

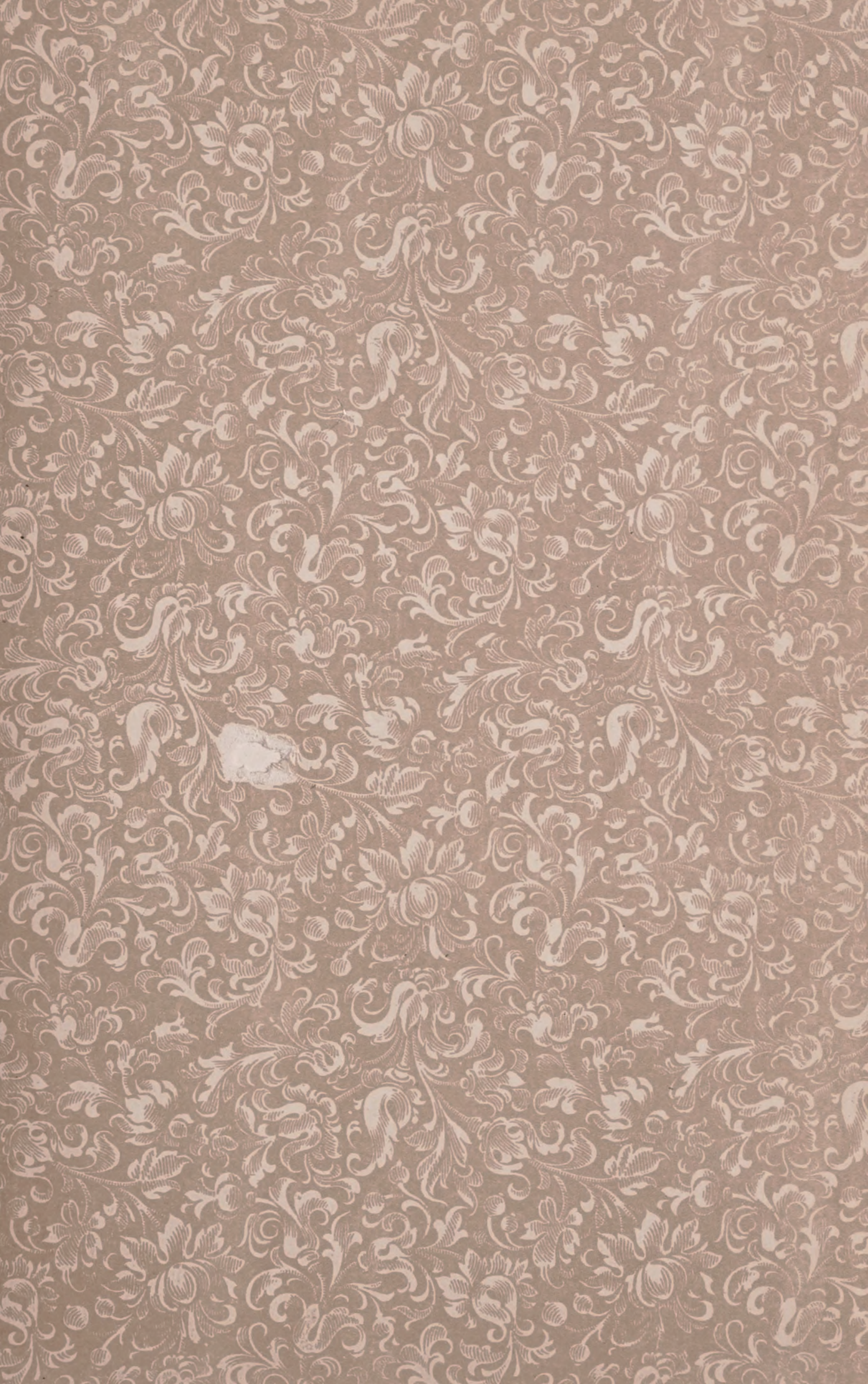
LITTLE
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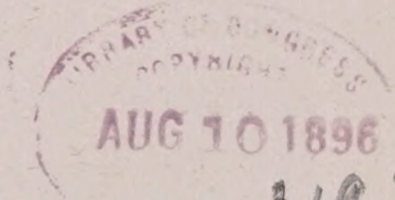
A

Little Maiden's Victory.

BY

✓
ALIDA W. GRAVES.

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# LITTLE MAIDEN'S VICTORY.

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## CHAPTER I.

THE May sun shone brightly through the wide-open door into the tidy kitchen where Ruth Avery was washing the breakfast dishes. The air was soft and balmy and full of the sweet fragrance of spring. Although the apple-blossoms had mostly fallen the ground was carpeted with their pink and white petals.

The birds were singing joyously in the trees near the house. Their songs made Ruth's heart wild with delight. She kept flying to the door, dish in hand, to listen to and to talk with her bird friends; for this lonely orphan girl, who lived with stern old Grandma Avery, had formed the habit of making companions of every living thing.

"Oh, you dear little robin-redbreast, I'm so so glad you have come! I do believe you are the very one that built a nest in that very apple-tree last summer. Now build it again, as high up to the sky as you can, so wicked boys can't reach it; I'll help you keep watch



over it, and you and I will be the best of friends."

The bird looked at her knowingly, as though he understood every word, then chirped away merrily.

"Oh, you saucy little thing, you need not cock your head at me that way; but sing on, sing on! I'm so glad you are back from your southern trip. But I must finish my work, or there'll be trouble when grandma comes; she has only gone over to Aunt Peggy's to see how her headache is to-day."

Then there was a clatter of dishes; but in a few moments Ruth was again at the door, with a large blue plate in her hand, which she was wiping vigorously.

"Do you know, dear robin, a lot of us girls are going on a picnic this afternoon, out into the beautiful woods, to find the hepaticas, the adder's-tongue, and the pretty white wind-flower; oh, wont it be fun!" Then in a lower tone, "I suspect they are going to crown me queen of the May; I know there's to be a pretty wreath, and I think it is for my head."

The robin chirped in sympathy and Ruth's black eyes danced merrily; her feet danced too, back into the kitchen, but by some unfortunate movement she tripped, dropping the plate and breaking it into a dozen pieces. She was



sobered in a moment, and looked down with dismay at the result of her carelessness.

"Grandma's beautiful Lafayette plate, the only one she had, and it belonged to her mother! I'm so sorry! Oh dear me, what shall I do! What will she say?"

In an instant she dropped upon the floor, a heart-broken little heap, as the thought came to her, bringing the tears and the sobs, "No picnic for me this afternoon."

But Ruth was a brave girl, and a girl of expedients. In a few moments she was upon her feet, drying her tears. She gathered up the pieces in her apron. "I'll go and bury them back of the wood-house," she thought, "then perhaps grandma will not miss the plate to-day. I'm going to that picnic whether or no; when she does miss it I'll own up, fair and square; any time after to-day."

As she started for the door something stopped her; the tender, pleading eyes of her mother seemed to be watching her, and her sweet voice to be saying, "Would that be right? My dear, dear child, do not deceive; do not act a lie."

"I can't do it," she exclaimed aloud, laying the fragments upon the table. Soberly and quietly she finished the dishes, dropping many tears upon them in spite of all her efforts. She just had everything nicely done when her grand-



mother walked into the room and at once discovered the broken plate.

"You heedless girl, have you broken my beautiful plate?" and she took up the bits of china so tenderly that Ruth's heart was touched; but regret at the loss of her precious bric-a-brac gave place immediately to indignation against the perpetrator of the mischief. "You are a wicked girl; you are the trial of my life. All these five years that you have lived with me you have been a torment. You deserve a sound whipping, big girl as you are."

"I know it, grandma; I wish you would give me one," broke in Ruth, thinking how much easier that would be to bear than the loss of the picnic.

"No; I don't whip other people's children, but, miss, you will not see any picnic this afternoon. You can put away that cake you baked yesterday and just stay at home—and see if you can learn a lesson. I will give you a long seam to sew."

Those interminable seams, Grandma Avery's pet form of punishment, how Ruth did hate them—especially on bright days when her young blood was just tingling to be out of doors!

Poor Grandmother Avery! She had forgotten that in the long years ago she herself had been a girl, thoughtless, wayward and careless.



"I cannot tell how many things you have broken since you have been in this house. That plate could not be bought for less than two or three dollars—even if I could find one; for they are very rare. My mother's plate, too," and the voice trembled again. Ruth felt an impulse to put her arms around her neck and beg her pardon, but before she could speak Mrs. Avery continued: "I cannot see, for the life of me, where you got your careless ways, unless it was from that inefficient mother of yours."

These insinuations about her loved and gentle mother Ruth could not endure. Her black eyes flashed, and stamping her foot, as she often did when angry, she exclaimed, "You shall not speak in that way about my dear good mother."

"I shall speak as I please; I do not intend to be dictated to by a chit of a girl like you about what I may say," and stately Grandmother Avery walked out of the room, leaving Ruth furiously indignant.



## CHAPTER II.

WHEN Mrs. Avery took her nine-years-old granddaughter, or "had her forced upon her," as she expressed it, "for where else could the child go unless it were to the Poorhouse or the Orphan Asylum?" she thanked the Lord that it "was not a boy with his uproarious ways," and that the girl was "every inch an Avery and not an Eastman." She often said, "Ruth has all the fire and spirit of an Avery; she is not a bit like her meek, quiet mother, who had not spunk enough to make a brave fight for life after her husband was killed."

So Ruth's great fault—a fiery temper—was often condoned, while her careless, thoughtless ways were condemned as though they were heinous sins. Thus the grandmother lost her moral power over the child.

"I mean to do my duty by her," Mrs. Avery said, and her duty she did, as she saw it; strict, stern duty, but without tenderness or love. "Petting makes weaklings," was one of her maxims. Poor, heart-hungry Ruth was in little danger of being surfeited with that kind of diet. The inflexible old lady did not dream of the



great longing there was in the child-heart for the gentle touch, the loving voice, and the tender prayers of the dear mother who was gone to the "Better Land." She did not dream how many times the little girl's pillow was wet with her tears because "I'm home-sick for mamma." Had she not allowed her to come and live under her roof, upsetting all the regulations of a quiet, systematic household? Out of a scanty income had she not given this child comfortable food and clothing, often denying herself? What more could be asked?

But our little maiden had that best of gifts, a cheerful spirit, without which all else is as ashes. She found much to make her happy, notwithstanding some sad and lonely hours. She loved the birds, the flowers, and all beautiful things, and had a peopled world of her own that Grandma Avery could not enter nor disturb. When she commenced attending the village school she soon proved herself an apt scholar, heading her classes and becoming a prime favorite with her mates, in spite of her quick temper, and a leader in all the fun and frolic.

That afternoon, after the dishes were washed, Mrs. Avery went to her room for her usual nap, leaving Ruth in possession of the kitchen. As she sat by the window with the "everlasting sewing" in her hand there was a frown upon



her usually bright face, and her lips were pursed together in a way that was not pleasant to see.

"I do hate to sew," she exclaimed. "I'll buy a sewing-machine the first money I earn teaching school; then good-bye, old needle! Here I've got to sit and stitch all this lovely Saturday afternoon while the girls are having such fun! It's real wicked in grandma, when she knows how much I want to go," and the tears fell fast.

Soon she heard voices, and went to the door to watch the approach of the merry cavalcade with its harmless equipment of baskets and packages. As they came up the path to the house several of the girls called out, "Come, Ruth, are you all ready?"

"No, I'm not; I cannot go!"

"Cannot go! But you *must* go; we cannot do without you," was echoed in chorus. "What is the matter? Why can't you go?"

"Oh, I broke grandma's Lafayette plate this morning, and to punish me she says I must stay at home and sew all the afternoon."

"Oh, the horrid thing!" "How cross and mean in her!" were the kind of exclamations that greeted this announcement.

"Was it that pretty plate I was looking at the other day, 'The Landing of Lafayette?'"



asked Clarence Stedman, for a few of the brothers were allowed to join the company.

"Yes; that was the one."

"Whew! I do n't wonder she was provoked; that was a daisy!"

"Where is your grandmother? Perhaps I can coax her into letting you go," said sweet Annie Stedman, the oldest of the girls.

"She's taking her nap; but it would n't do any good, when she says *no* it's no forever."

"Like the laws of the Medes and Persians we were studying about the other day in Sunday-school," laughed Annie.

Annie was two years older than Ruth, and had a sweet kind of motherly influence over her younger friend. "So your grandma's asleep; is she? What's to hinder you from putting on your hat and coming right along with us? She wont find out till we are safe in the woods. If she tries to follow you she can't find you, for we are going to a new place," was the proposition of one of the girls. The others chimed in, "Come, Ruth, do it; hurry and get your things."

Ruth's face brightened for a moment. "I believe I will." Then she hesitated as the question came to her mind, "Would it be right to deceive grandmother that way?" Again something was tugging at her heart-strings, and her dear mother's eyes seemed to be watching her.



"No, I cannot do that," she said at length very decidedly; "it would not be right," and she turned and went into the house.

"Bravo for you, Ruth; you are made of good stuff!" called out Clarence Stedman, which comforted her a little; but May Andrews' parting words, "You'll be sorry; I have that lovely story-book, and Annie is going to read to us," were very aggravating.

"That lovely story-book," and dear, sweet Annie to read it, what a joy that would be! Story-books were a tabooed pleasure to Ruth Avery. "You shall not waste your time over any such nonsense," said practical Grandma Avery. Even many of the Sunday-school books she condemned. "They did not fill girls' heads with any such foolishness when *I* was young."

The house was very still and lonely as Ruth, with a sober face, took up her sewing. The tall, old-fashioned clock—generally her great admiration—was very exasperating as its measured tick counted off the seconds of an afternoon that she thought would be endless.



## CHAPTER III.

WHEN Mrs. Avery walked out of her room, with a clean white apron on and looking generally refreshed, she found the disconsolate Ruth sitting just where she had left her two hours before. She examined her work. "Why, Ruth Avery, is that all you have done? Well, you will have to finish your stint, if you sew until dark."

But she stopped suddenly, as she noticed Ruth's red eyes and forlorn expression, so different from her usual bright look. Something touched the old lady's heart, for she really had a heart under her stern exterior. How could she know that the giving up of a little thing like a picnic would be such a keen disappointment to Ruth? She did not imagine all the struggles and temptations of the day, nor how the demon of distrust had tortured the poor girl's heart, making her wonder if God had forgotten her, and wonder, too, if he were like Grandma Avery. But through all that hard afternoon one thought had comforted her: "God must be good; for he was my dear mamma's God."

Ah, Grandma Avery, you do not understand



girls! You have allowed the years to estrange you from the young, and your heart has grown old with your body.

Mrs. Avery went into the pantry, and coming out with a large pitcher in her hand started down the cellar stairs. In a moment Ruth heard a crash. She sprang up and clapped her hands gleefully, exclaiming, "There; grandma's broken that nice pitcher, and I'm glad. So other folks can break things as well as Ruth Avery!"

She listened for her grandmother to come up, then thought she heard a groan, and rushing to the door saw her lying at the foot of the stairs very still and white. Ruth was terrified, but hastened to get water and camphor, hoping it was faintness, as it proved to be. In a few moments Mrs. Avery opened her eyes with a groan. "Oh, Ruth, I fear I have broken my leg; go for Aunt Peggy."

In the yard Ruth found Sam—the faithful man-of-all-work, a relative of Mrs. Avery's, who managed the little farm—and sent him for Aunt Peggy. The three succeeded in getting Mrs. Avery up stairs and upon her bed, then Sam went in all haste for the doctor.

"Oh, Ruth, child, what a dreadful thing has happened to me! What shall I do! How can I lie here five or six weeks?" and the strong, vigorous woman, who had always been so active, burst



into tears, the first that Ruth had ever seen her shed. Her own tears came, too, for they were very near the surface that afternoon; "Poor, dear grandma, I'm so sorry," she said tenderly, kissing and stroking the faded cheek. Her grandmother returned the kiss and clung to her hand.

"What will you do, child? But I am so glad I have you; what could I do without you!" These words of loving appreciation did Ruth more good than any words Mrs. Avery had ever spoken to her since she came to live in that house.

"Never you fear, grandma; I'm well and strong, and you'll soon be on your feet again." With such kind words she tried to comfort her until the doctor came.

It was a bad fracture, the doctor found, below the knee; for certain reasons he thought it not best to put the limb in a plaster-of-Paris cast, but applied splints and bandages, administering an anodyne during the painful operation of setting the bone. Ruth watched it all closely, with great interest; she was handy and quick, and was able to be of real assistance; she asked so many bright, intelligent questions that the young doctor remarked, "You will make a good nurse, I am sure," which her grandmother had to spoil by opening her eyes suddenly and add-



ing, "If she does not forget, or have a careless fit."

"She may forget," laughed the doctor; "you know the adage about not expecting old heads on young shoulders."

Mrs. Avery assented quietly: "Yes, I know; I am glad I have a granddaughter now, if she is young and thoughtless." After all was finished, and the weight applied to the foot, Mrs. Avery felt like a prisoner in a cell; she rebelled against this hard discipline.

"Now, honey, you go out and have a run; you's goin' to see hard times," said Peggy. "What kept you home from the picnic?"

"I broke a plate, and had to stay at home and sew; and, I declare, I have not finished that seam!"

"And, you wont, this day," with a contemptuous toss of her head. "Your granny better give me this old sheet, 'stead of makin' you turn it; such nonsense!" gathering up the despised article. "I guessed somethin' was up when I saw the gals go by without you. The Lord only knows what your granny would have done if you'd gone; she'd be a-lyin' in that cellar yet, I guess. They're all comin' back now, I do believe—from the shoutin'."

Ruth was at the gate to greet the returning party; her face was brighter than when they



went. "We have had such a lovely time!—only we did miss you," was the verdict of the tired but merry group.

When Ruth told of the misfortune that had come to her grandmother May Andrews broke out, "Good! That's to punish her for being so ugly to you."

"And she broke her choice pitcher," said Ruth, with a malicious gleam in her eyes; then her better nature spoke: "Poor dear grandma! I'm so sorry for her."

"So say we all of us," exclaimed Clarence Stedman.

Then they opened their baskets and gave her the pretty woodsy things that they had brought for her; there were wintergreens, mosses, sweet blue violets, and other exquisitely beautiful blossoms with which God adorns the woods of spring, and which teach so many pleasant lessons. They were a little faded, to be sure, but Ruth took them with delight, for she loved them dearly.

"And this is for you, Ruth," said Annie Stedman; "we made it for you, and none of the girls would wear it; they said it was yours," taking out a pretty wreath of flowers which had been kept moist and looked quite fresh.

"Now if you only had those long brown curls that your naughty grandame cut off, how



nice you would look," said May Andrews, placing the wreath on Ruth's head.

Then with mock salutes to their queen, and much fun and laughter, they bade her good-night. But Annie lingered for a moment. "I fear you cannot come to Sunday-school to-morrow."

"No, but I suppose I can study my catechism; that will please grandma," with a roguish smile. "And day-school too—I fear I must miss that," and Ruth looked sober.

"I'm sorry; it is going to be hard for you. But ask Jesus to help you," Annie whispered with her parting kiss.



## CHAPTER IV.

THE next day, the Sabbath, found Mrs. Avery uncomfortable and restless, but very patient. When Ruth came into her room in the early morning she was astonished at the gentle, subdued expression on the pale, wrinkled face. Kind Mrs. Hart, their next door neighbor, had stayed with her through the night, and done all she could to cheer and comfort. Ruth was still more astonished when her grandmother said kindly, "You can go to Sunday-school, Ruth, and stay to church if you like, for Aunt Peggy is coming to stay all day ; she has no work to-day."

"But, grandma, I will not leave you alone with Peggy."

"Yes, go, child ; there will be plenty of times when you cannot go anywhere."

When, on Ruth's return from church, Mrs. Avery asked her to read a chapter from the Bible her astonishment reached its height. Mrs. Avery was a nominal church member, but for many years business and hard work had crowded out church duties, and often Bible-reading and prayer. Ruth, as a bright child



comparing her mother and her grandmother, had often wondered what made church members so different.

But Grandma Avery had been faithful in sending her charge to Sunday-school and in teaching her the catechism, which Ruth hated as badly as she did sewing. But by her grandmother's determined efforts the difficult sentences and hard words were permanently lodged in her memory, many of its glorious truths to become a mine of wealth to her in future years.

"What chapter shall I read?" asked Ruth, after she had secured the Bible.

"I fear, child, it is dusty," with a little sigh. "Read the fourteenth chapter of John; something to comfort me and help me bear this trouble. I never had anything like this to bear; how can I lie here all these weeks!" There was a tremor in the usually strong voice that was pitiful.

"Oh, grandma, it wont seem so very long."

"You do not know anything about it, child. Then there is all the expense."

"Well, don't think of that now, grandma," and Ruth stooped and kissed her, and again had the kiss tenderly returned.

Ruth read in a clear, pleasant voice, and very expressively, many of the sweet words that she knew that her mother used to love,



for they were heavily marked in that treasured little Bible that had been her mother's. Her grandmother grew quiet, and soon Ruth thought her asleep, but as she rose to put away the book the closed eyes opened, and she said gently, "Thank you, Ruth."

But in a few moments she was breathing regularly again, and Ruth tiptoed softly out of the room to Aunt Peggy. "Oh, this has been such a happy day; grandma kisses me as though she really loved me. She's so good; she acts like a Christian now."

"Tut, tut, honey; 'taint for the likes of us to be judgin'. Your granny's got a high sperrit; she gets hard, sometimes, but the Lord, he knows all 'bout her heart. You've got the same high sperrit, Ruth, honey; it'll take lots of hard knocks to bring you down."

"You've told me that a great many times, Peggy; I ought to know it by this time. Grandma does n't think my temper's anything so very bad. If I could only get over my careless ways I think she would call me a very good girl."

"Your granny's stone blind. I axed her the other day when she thought she was going to tame you down, and she only laughed. But your dead mammy used to cry over you when you got such mad fits. You know the blessin's for the meek."



"Yes, and for the honest, I suppose," a home thrust that Aunt Peggy could not parry, as she had the reputation of being a little light-fingered, although with stern Mrs. Avery she was always on her good behavior.

Then Ruth sauntered out and climbed into her favorite seat in the apple-tree, to talk with her birds and to read her Sunday-school book.

"I know well enough that Aunt Peggy's right, and grandma is wrong," she thought. "My quick ugly temper is the very worst thing about me; but how is it ever to be changed? Grandma does make me so mad; if she would always be as she is to-day I might improve." Then sweet Annie Stedman's words came to her mind: "Ask Jesus to help you," and from the apple-bough she sent up an earnest prayer that reached the Saviour's ear, as all sincere prayers do.

The robin eyed her askance, but without any sign of fear, and chirped his good-night. "Good-night, dear robin-redbreast; God will take care of you, and of me," exclaimed Ruth. "I guess he loves us both."

Soon the church bell in the village sent out its sweet call to evening service. "The Christian Endeavor meeting!" starting from her seat. "I believe I'll ask grandma if I cannot go; she is so very good to-day, she may say



yes;" but she remembered that Aunt Peggy must soon be going home, so consoled herself by singing softly one of the hymns—"God be with you till we meet again"—thinking all the time of dear Annie Stedman.

That she could not join the young people's society and attend their meetings had been one of Ruth's great trials. She had more than one battle of words over the matter with Grandma Avery, but, as usual, the old lady was inflexible. "I am not going to have you traipsing down to the village Sunday evenings; you cannot come home alone, and if a lot of youngsters come with you it will be nothing more than a frolic. You can study your catechism and then go to bed and get well rested, so you can be up bright and early Monday morning to help me with the washing before you go to school. That is Christian Endeavor enough for a girl like you. They did not have any such excitements in my day; the children went to prayer-meeting with their elders."

So poor Ruth lost this opportunity of meeting her young friends, her loved Annie particularly. But she lost something of more importance, and that was the help and inspiration that comes from these enthusiastic gatherings of brave young hearts fired with love for Christ and with zeal in his service. She needed all



these helps sadly in her daily struggle with temptation. Life seemed very hard to her at times, but her sunny, cheerful disposition kept her sweet-hearted.

Sitting there in the apple-tree, in the mellow light of a spring sunset, Ruth felt very happy. The disappointment of Saturday had passed out of mind completely. Her little soliloquy to herself and the birds was a cheery one: "I know I shall have to work hard, and stay at home from school; but if grandma gets kind and good, and loves me and pets me as mamma used to do, I'm sure I shall be a better girl. I shall be so glad that I can sing all the day long."



## CHAPTER V.

WITH the light of Monday morning came plenty of work for Ruth's willing hands to do; work that might have taxed the strength of a grown woman. Thanks to her grandmother's wise treatment, Ruth Avery possessed the treasure of a strong, healthy body. Plenty of good wholesome food, without dainties, plenty of sleep, of fresh air, and of exercise, with regular baths, had strengthened her muscles and sent the pure blood coursing through her veins, making her eyes bright and her cheeks rosy.

"She shall not be weakly, like her mother, if I can help it," Mrs. Avery often said. "She has her father's good constitution and I mean to preserve it." When she looked at her well-developed fourteen-years-old granddaughter she felt well satisfied with the result of her efforts.

Everything moved along very smoothly and seemed easy to Ruth that morning. The sense of her responsibility made her feel very womanly. Then it was a real pleasure to have the kitchen to herself, without a pair of sharp eyes to watch her every moment and a rasping voice to reprove every careless movement. She could



dance and sing around the house, if she did it softly, but she was very careful not to break anything.

Mrs. Avery was worried and fearful lest Ruth should over-do. She sent for Sam, and gave him minute directions about helping her with the small washing that must be done, charging him to carry all the water, to turn the washing-machine, and to assist Ruth in every way.

Sam was a staid old bachelor, of about fifty, who had lived with Mrs. Avery for years, and who was too dignified and important a personage generally to do any house work. But he was so sorry for the plucky young girl upon whose shoulders so much hard work and care had suddenly fallen that he took hold with a will.

It was great fun for Ruth to have Sam for her factotum, for his oddities of speech and manner were her continual amusement. From the little back summer-kitchen peals of laughter penetrated to the bed-room where Mrs. Avery lay a helpless prisoner, and frightened the good woman. "Ruth's foolishness will surely provoke Sam, and he will leave," she thought. The possibility of such a happening started the perspiration, for Sam—a kind of despot in the little household—was a very necessary member of the family.



But her alarm was needless ; for Sam himself was enjoying the merriment, although he hardly imagined how much of it was at his own expense. For the first time the washing was done to the accompaniment of song and laughter. Before noon Ruth had the satisfaction of seeing sheets, tablecloth and underwear flapping in the breeze all as white and clean as Grandma Avery herself could make them. Ruth knew what should be done, and her mind was thoroughly on her work that morning. The rooms were put in nice order, the dinner prepared and an inviting tray carried in to Mrs. Avery. By two o'clock the Monday's extra duties were all done, as she announced triumphantly to her grandmother.

"I fear you have slighted some things, Ruth. Did you get the stains out of the tablecloth, and did you wash the dish-towels and spread them on the grass?"

"Yes, grandma, I did ; I am sure everything is as well done as you could do it yourself."

"Well, child, perhaps it is. I cannot help it if it is not ; no work for me these many days," with a longdrawn sigh, "only just to lie here and wait."

Then Ruth told of some of the funny sayings and doings of the morning until she suc-



ceeded in making her grandmother laugh outright in spite of herself. It had been her principle never to join Ruth in a laugh against Sam, whatever she might do when the girl was not present. "Sam is a good man, and you must not make fun of him," had been her continual admonition.

As Ruth was putting a finishing touch to her work, by arranging a few flowers in the only vase the house contained, she saw kind Mrs. Hart coming up the walk with a market-basket on her arm. "Why, Ruth dear, you do not say that you have the washing out, and the work all done as nice as a pin!" looking around the tidy kitchen.

"Yes, indeed; Sam and I did the washing."

"Sam and you did the washing? Not Sam!"

"Yes; yes; he helped! If you only could have seen how comical and awkward he was. Oh such fun!" and Ruth danced around the room in great glee.

Mrs. Hart laughed. "And have you given your grandmother anything to eat?" taking from her capacious basket a pie, a cake, and a loaf of bread.

"She's had a good dinner, and she ate it with a relish; but these things will come in awful nice."

"Very nice, you mean, Ruth."



"Yes, *very* nice ; for we may get *awful* hungry," laughing, "on my cooking."

"Why, my dear child, you have done finely this morning ; not broken anything, nor spoiled anything."

"No, not a thing, I believe."

"I always told Mrs. Avery that you had good stuff in you ; that you would develop into a sensible, capable woman that she could be proud of some day. It takes these emergencies to bring out what is in our girls," and she smoothed the wavy hair so gently and looked into the bright young face so tenderly that it almost brought the tears. Words of encouragement and appreciation were rare to Ruth Avery.

"But, dear Mrs. Hart, there is one thing I shall never learn how to do, and that is to sew."

Mrs. Hart could not but smile, for she knew how much of Ruth's discipline had been given with that seemingly harmless utensil, the needle.

"Grandma says I'm very awkward, and I know I am. I do believe I could learn to play the piano easier, and I'm sure it is much easier to draw ; I love to do that at school."

"Perhaps you could come and practise on my organ occasionally," said Mrs. Hart, thinking that the stern guardian might be more indulgent to the orphan girl in the future. "Now go and take a rest after all this work."



"Do I look as though I needed it? I'm not tired in the least. I'm so strong," feeling the muscles in her arm.

"Well, go out into the sunshine, then, while I sit with Mrs. Avery. Oh, I forgot: there is a book for you in my basket; a story-book, but such a good one that your grandmother cannot object."

"Thank you! thank you!" cried Ruth, and grasping the treasure she was soon ensconced in her apple-tree bower, ready to spend a most delightful afternoon.



## CHAPTER VI.

WHEN, after a little colloquy with her winged friends, she opened the paper-covered book her first feeling was one of disappointment. "A Sunday-school book!" she exclaimed, as she glanced at the title: "Antipas, and others whom Jesus loved." But the illustrations looked inviting, and she soon grew greatly interested in this tale of Christ. As she read on she grew delighted with the story; a great longing filled her heart to have this blessed One for her friend and her Saviour.

Ruth could remember the time when she had thought herself a Christian. One lovely winter's evening was very distinct in her memory. She had been out riding down hill with her only brother. The sky was beautiful with the gorgeous sunset coloring. As she came up the hill to the house the loveliness of the scene, the bright tints of the sky above and the gleaming snow beneath, left an impression on the imaginative child that had never been effaced.

She came into the room where her delicate mother was sitting in the fading light, and leaning on her knee and looking up into that sweet



face she exclaimed, "Oh, mamma, I'm so happy, so happy!"

"I am glad; what makes my darling so happy?" drawing her close.

"Oh, God is so good; I do love God. Can't I be a Christian?"

Then the sainted mother took the little girl on her lap and told her in simple words, that she could understand, what it was to be a Christian—to love, to trust, and to serve the Saviour. Could she ever forget that sweet, loving, but plain explanation? How easy it seemed to her childish mind to love and trust the blessed Jesus. And the mother had her kneel down and ask the Saviour to forgive her sins, to make her his child, and to keep her from all evil.

For months she had lived a happy life, reading the Bible daily and praying at her mother's side, until the darkness fell upon her home. First the angels came for her little brother; then the loved mother went home to God, leaving Ruth alone, a heart-broken little girl.

When she was taken by her grandmother and given a good home her heart was starving for love—the strong mother-love that she had lost. But this Mrs. Avery did not understand. Her exacting commands and loveless rules, so different from her mother's gentle but firm control, exasperated the child, rousing her quick



temper, which her mother had taught her was a great fault. She rebelled against her grandmother's authority with great indignation, although she dared not disobey. She forgot about her heavenly Friend, and neglected her little Bible and her daily prayers.

Thus she gradually wandered away from the pleasant path of love and trust in which her childish feet had begun to walk. But all this time in her innermost heart was a shrine where her beloved mother dwelt, and with her that mother's God and Saviour. And that same Saviour had not ceased to care for his little wandering child, and this afternoon he was calling her back to him in most tender, loving tones.

Mrs. Hart's cheery summons, "Come, Ruth, it is almost night, and I must go home soon," aroused her from her book. She found that the sun was almost down and Sam was driving home the cows. "I have given your grandmother her supper and yours is all ready. Have you had a pleasant afternoon?" glancing into the flushed face.

"Oh yes, very; but this book makes my heart ache. Oh, Mrs. Hart, I do want to be a Christian," with a choking sob.

Mrs. Hart looked amazed. "Well, Ruth, it is easy to be one."



"Tell me how, Mrs. Hart—how to keep from getting angry and being so wicked."

Mrs. Hart was not used to giving religious instruction; she hardly knew how to reply. "Ask your Sunday-school teacher; she can tell you better than I can."

"I don't seem to know her very well; but I will ask Annie Stedman."

"Well, Ruth dear, there is One who can teach you, and that one is God; ask him."

That evening, when she went to say good-night, her grandmother asked in the old sharp tone, "Ruth, what have you been doing all this afternoon? Have you wasted all these hours?"

An angry retort rose to her lips at once, but she checked herself and answered gently, "Not wasting them, grandma; I've been reading the sweetest book, that Mrs. Hart brought me."

"A story-book, I dare say."

"Yes; a story about Christ. I must read it to you, grandmother, it is so lovely."

Something in Ruth's tone and manner checked Mrs. Avery. "I wish you could read me something to take away this nervousness. How I am to lie here much longer is more than I can tell," petulantly. "But go to bed now, for you must be up early to-morrow to iron and do all the other work. Mrs. Hart says you have



done very well to-day. I hope you will not go back to your old careless ways."

This was the nearest to approbation that Mrs. Avery could come. But Ruth was thankful for even such praise.

Ruth had been obliged to leave her snug little nest up stairs and to take a room next to her grandmother's, that she might be near her during the night. The moon was shining brightly, so she did not need a lamp. After she was undressed she kneeled by the bedside a long time. Mrs. Avery watched the white-robed kneeling figure with a pang. "If I prayed to God as long as that perhaps I could have more patience to bear this trouble," she thought.

God alone knew what an earnest petition it was that Ruth offered that night. "Make me a true Christian," was its burden. "Help grandma to be one too," were its closing words.

"And a little child shall lead them."



## CHAPTER VII.

RUTH was up with the birds the next morning, singing about the house as happy as they until her grandmother called out, "Ruth, do not make so much noise; you make my head ache."

When she opened the windows in the small parlor again the fretful voice chided: "Do not let the sun shine on that carpet; you will fade it all out."

"No, grandma, I'll only let in a little fresh air."

Ruth liked an excuse for going into the parlor—Mrs. Avery's *sanctum sanctorum*—with its quaint furniture. There was a table with pretty claw feet, a sofa and a mantel glass, brass candlesticks and andirons that would have delighted the heart of the lover of the old-fashioned and antique. But she did not often have an opportunity of enjoying these things, for the room was rarely opened. "Have the little spinning-wheel from the garret in here," Ruth had often urged, but Mrs. Avery had insisted that a parlor was no place for spinning-wheels.

"The air is so sweet this morning, grandma.



It's almost the last of May—and then will come lovely June!"

Mrs. Avery groaned in spirit, as well as audibly. "And I must lie here, with this weight on my foot, when there is so much spring work unfinished." She had had an uncomfortable, sleepless night, and the morning found her nervous and discouraged. "How can I bear it, Ruth! If I were sick it would be different; but to be well and yet to be tied down to this bed—it is too much to bear."

"Ask Jesus to help you," Ruth said softly, repeating Annie's words.

"Does God care? If he does, why did he allow this misfortune to come to me?" in a broken voice."

"He does care, grandma; he loves us so much."

"I used to call myself a Christian, but I fear I have wandered away from God."

"But you can come back; he'll be so glad to have you," thinking of the assurance of her own forgiveness and welcome that had come to her heart the previous evening. "I too am trying to be a Christian, grandma."

"You, dear child? God help us both!" and the eyes filled.

Ruth smoothed the wrinkled cheeks caressingly. "I'll bring you a good cup of coffee



and some breakfast; then you'll feel ever so much better," and she flitted out of the room with a happy heart.

Sam had a fire made and the kettle boiling merrily in the little back kitchen.

"You will have a hard day," said Mrs. Avery when Ruth returned with the tray. "You must send for Aunt Peggy; there is the ironing to be done and a large churning."

"Oh, Sam will churn for me."

"But who will get the cream ready?"

"I can easily do that."

"I fear you will spill it and waste it."

"No, I wont, grandma. I'll be ever so careful."

"But you would better have Aunt Peggy; I do not want you tired out. Only you must watch her that she does not steal; she needs watching."

"Yes, I know her," laughed Ruth.

Aunt Peggy could come that day, and with two pairs of willing hands the work moved off rapidly—easily and joyously to Ruth. A happy heart is a powerful motor.

Once Sam put his head in at the open door, saying, in his comical drawl, "Them pesky little pigs is out again—rooted theirselves right out of the pen. I never see such mischievous things in my mortal life. Now I must go hunt 'em."

Soon Ruth heard a great noise, and rushing



to the door saw Sam coming with a little white pig under each arm: the little creatures were squealing lustily, and squirming so that he could hardly hold them. "I've cotched the pesky things, and I'll fix 'em so they'll stay put," he called out, while Ruth laughed at the comical sight.

Mrs. Avery's bell rang furiously. "Ruth, what is the matter with the pigs? Run quick and see."

Ruth explained, making it all as funny as possible. "Poor Sam! He needs me to tell him how to fix that pen. He does lack gumption; but do not laugh at him, Ruth."

After dinner Peggy did some cleaning, and then thought that she must go home. Ruth was congratulating herself that nothing had been stolen. "Just take those tubs down cellar for me first, Peggy. Sam has forgotten them."

Ruth noticed that Aunt Peggy wore a water-proof, and wondered why she needed a cloak such a warm day. When Peggy came up stairs by an adroit movement Ruth pulled up this outer garment, and found a bag in her hand filled with potatoes. "Oh, Peggy, you've been stealing potatoes, and we have very few left."

"No, honey, I did n't steal um; your granny gin um to me."

"Now, Peggy, do n't tell me that, for I know



better ; you are a wicked thing, to steal and then to lie about it." Ruth's eyes flashed, and she stamped her foot in anger.

"Tut, tut, sissy ; do n't get mad nor nuthin' ; it 's wicked."

"I know it is ; and it 's wicked to steal and to lie ; but I 'll go and ask grandma about it."

"Do n't do that foolishness now, honey, it 'll only bother her, and make her narvussy. She most gen'ally gins me somethin' when I go. I needs potatoes, and know she 'd gim me some."

"I know she would not, for ours are almost gone."

"I tell you what we 'll do, sis ; let it go on my pay."

"Well, then, I 'll measure them," and Ruth started for the wood-house to get the measure, but it took some time to find it, for order was not one of Sam's "first laws." When she returned Peggy and her potatoes were not to be found.

Upon examination Ruth discovered that the glass jars in which the tea and coffee were kept were almost empty. "That good-for-nothing old Aunt Peggy ! She 's stolen tea and coffee too," she exclaimed. "How provoked grandma will be ; how she will scold me !" and Ruth was ready to cry with vexation. But she went directly in with the whole story.



"I told you so; you will know better next time. But I will fix it when I come to settle with her, so do n't you worry, child; it cannot be helped," in a kindly tone.

Ruth wondered if another woman had not taken Grandma Avery's place.

Soon Mrs. Hart came over to sit a while and give Ruth a little outing. "No, she must finish that sheet first," Mrs. Avery said very decidedly, and Ruth concluded that the real grandmother was still present. She bit her lip to keep back an angry word, but the independent toss of the head could not be hidden.

She walked into the kitchen, twitched out the work that lay folded up on the stand—and found that the long seam was almost done.

"Dear, good Mrs. Hart!—she has been sewing on this, and here I've been so angry because I thought I must lose the afternoon. I'm so sorry," and the flushed face grew sober and gentle.

Then Mrs. Hart gave her some instructions in sewing, teaching her how to hold her needle, etc., a few hints that helped her more than all Grandmother Avery's fault-finding and scolding had ever done.

The seam was soon completed, and Ruth rushed out to her seat to finish her book. There Annie Stedman found her, when she came up after school. "I cannot invite you into my sky-



parlor, as there's only room for one up here, but I'm just as glad as I can be to see you; it's just lovely in you to come."

The two girls soon found a seat in the garden. "I've brought your drawing-book and pencils, Ruth. I thought you might want them."

"Oh, I'm delighted!" She commenced telling Annie some of the day's experiences, then opened her book and drew a picture of Sam bringing home the two pigs; the little sketch was so comical that both girls laughed heartily.

But their conversation soon drifted to more serious things. Ruth could open her heart to this friend as to no one else. She had her book to talk over, and many questions to ask. She needed help and counsel. Annie Stedman was an earnest Christian, and mature beyond her years. There in the garden, that afternoon, she "threw out the life-line" of a loving influence that was one means of drawing Ruth Avery's straying feet back to her Saviour.



## CHAPTER VIII.

As the days passed Mrs. Avery grew more and more nervous and exacting: more and more she chafed against the confinement, the enforced idleness. Nothing in past years, not even the death of her husband and son, had been such a trial, for then she found diversion in work and excitement in the shrewd management of her affairs so as to make ends meet. She had the "faculty" of a perfect housekeeper; her little home was a model of neatness, system, and order.

Her incessant worries about the work, or the waste, grew very tiresome to the young girl who was trying so hard to be faithful and patient. The sharp ring of the little bell, or the fretful, imperative call of "Ruth! Ruth!" was often so exasperating that Ruth had to bite her lips to keep back the angry, impatient replies. This constant strain, with all there was to be done, was a great tax upon her strength. She often felt tired, and ached in every bone; she wondered at the strange, weary feeling that often made her usually nimble feet lag, and sometimes almost refuse to move.



But at night poor Mrs. Avery would often grow quiet and gentle, and she would ask tremblingly, "Will I ever walk again?" Then Ruth's heart would be full of pity instead of vexation.

"Poor child!" said Mrs. Avery one evening, "you will surely be sick; you must get Aunt Peggy to help you again," for since the theft Ruth had declined her assistance. "She is a good, neat worker, and I will manage her; send her to me."

The next morning Ruth thought that she would see what impression she could make herself upon Peggy's conscience. So she walked over to the little house near by, where Peggy lived with her little nephew—a comical little pickaninny—a pig, and some chickens, that seemed to have almost as free range of the house as the inmates themselves.

"We want you to come over and work, Aunt Peggy, if you will only promise to keep your fingers off from things. You stole tea and coffee the other day, as well as potatoes."

"Now, child, you got the wrong pig by the ears this time, sure; you 've mistook, for sartin."

"Now don't lie to me, Peggy; I'm just as sure you did it as though I had seen you with my own eyes. It's a great sin, it's very wrong, to steal, or to lie," said Ruth very solemnly.



Peggy looked ashamed. "Of course it is;" then she defended herself, as usual, by adding, "and it's wicked to get mad too, honey."

"But, Peggy, I'm trying very hard to do better. I sometimes wish that my feet were tied down to the floor, so they could not stamp; I've been learning a sweet secret lately that makes it easier."

"What's that, honey?"

"Asking Jesus to help me."

"Oh, you mean *that*! I've heard tell 'bout that in meetin'. I'm no heathen."

"Why, Peggy, I fear you don't want to stop doing wrong," in a shocked, grieved tone.

Aunt Peggy looked at her a moment, then explained: "Tell you how 'tis, honey: when I see folks havin' all the good things, and I have nothin', I just can't stop helpin' myself."

"But it's wrong, all the same, Peggy. God loves you, and he wants to help you to be good. Will you not let him? Will you not try to do what is right?"

There was a wistful, tender look in the bright face, a soft expression in the sharp black eyes—"Granny Avery's eyes," Peggy called them—that stirred the ignorant colored woman's very heart. She looked at the young girl in amazement, then said gently, "Wall, wall, if a slip of a gal like you's going to fight the devil that-a-



way, I guess an old woman like me better stop stealin' and lyin'."

Aunt Peggy came, and Ruth found no cause for the old complaint. One day, unknown to Peggy, she saw her take up a package in the pantry, as though sorely tempted to confiscate it, then drop it quickly. "I believe she put up a little prayer, as I do, and Jesus came to her help," thought Ruth. She reported the act to her grandmother, with the remark, "I do believe Aunt Peggy is converted."

"She must be, if she stops stealing of her own accord and not from fear of detection."

"But, grandma, don't you think God would help poor Aunt Peggy, if she asked him? I know that he helps me."

"Yes, child, I am sure he would. I do not know what I should do if he did not come to my rescue; I should go raving crazy, lying here day after day."

As the beautiful June days came and went Ruth pined to be out in the woods and fields, among the birds and flowers, yet her feet were often too tired for a ramble, and they did not so much incline to dance around the house as they once did. She grew sober and careful, but it seemed harder to be patient. Only once did she break anything, and then the crash made her grandmother desperate.



"Ruth Avery, what under the sun have you broken now?"

"It's only that old cracked platter that you dry fruit on," cried Ruth resentfully.

"Well, I am glad it is not the best dish I have in the house," with a sigh of relief. "I expect there will not be a thing left by the time I get around again—if I ever do," in that pathetic tone that always went to Ruth's heart.

"Oh, you will, grandma, and very soon; the doctor says you are doing finely."

Mrs. Hart came to relieve Ruth when she could be spared from her own family. One day, coming in after quite an absence, she was surprised at the change in Ruth. "This will never do," pinching her pale cheek; "you must go right out into the sunshine."

"Do you not want to drive to the village and go to the bank for me?" asked Mrs. Avery; "I cannot trust that stupid Sam to do any such business."

"Oh, grandma, that would be the best kind of fun."

"Tell Sam to harness up Dollie and you can go at once."

"Why not let Sam go too, and drive?" asked Mrs. Hart.

"He must not leave his work; he is clear behindhand anyway; if I were a man I would



not poke as he does. I drive Dollie, and so does Ruth ; she is very gentle."

This was a rare opportunity for Ruth. Dollie was a great pet, although she would snap at a woman, and once had left the impress of her teeth on Ruth's arm. She was the only animal she could pet, as her grandmother would not allow cat or dog on the premises. Sometimes Sam surreptitiously had a cat at the barn, "just to give the rats a hint," but it would be so wild that petting would be impossible.

"You must look out for this horse ; she's old, but she's frisky ; them pesky boys down to the village just love to make her jump. Stones and pieces of paper'll scare her if you don't watch out. Hold the reins good and snug ; she can pull on the reins like all possessed, the critter can ; and don't drive too fast ; it's warm."

"Do stop your advice, Sam," laughed Ruth, "or I'll never get to town before the bank closes." She started off in high glee, calling back, "I shall come home the longest way."



## CHAPTER IX.

IT was a very happy girl who drove along the pleasant country road that lovely June day. "Oh, you daintily-stepping Dollie; you are no common horse, but a real aristocratic steed," she exclaimed.

It was the first time she had ever driven any distance alone; generally her grandmother was along, either driving or finding constant fault with Ruth's driving. But now she had the horse and the whole beautiful country all to herself. Not a charming sight or sound escaped her notice. The birds, the trees, the delicately green grass and the blue sky above her head all seemed to whisper of God's love. There was a sweet, tender feeling in her heart when she thought of her Heavenly Father, a feeling that was new and delightful.

She drove directly to the bank. Dollie rebelled against being tied by a person in skirts. "I will hold her for you," said a gentleman who knew the animal's ways. Ruth thanked him and went into the bank. She presented her check and bank-book and drew the money, following her grandmother's directions exactly.



She did some other errands and then started for home by the longest and most lonely road.

As she drove down the street the scholars were just coming out from the school-building. A shout of welcome and a chorus of exclamations greeted Ruth. One girl waved her parasol, which frightened Dollie and made her spring to one side; but the road was wide and level, so no harm was done. Ruth soon quieted her, so as to stop and have a little chat with some of her friends, Annie Stedman in particular. But Dollie's mettle was aroused and she was impatient to be off, so Ruth gave her the reins and away they started in grand style, May Andrews exclaiming, "Oh, Ruth, your grandmother would have a fit, to see you driving at that pace!"

It took Ruth some time to get Dollie tamed down to a respectable trot, so that she could look around and enjoy the beautiful changes spring had wrought. It seemed almost like a new road to her, in its fresh dress. She had forgotten all about the horse, when a rough voice called out, "Please, miss, give me a ride."

Ruth looked up, startled, into the vicious face of a tramp whom she remembered noticing as she came out of the bank. She thought of the money in her possession, and catching the whip gave Dollie a sharp cut that made the animal leap almost out of the thills, for the



high-spirited horse always resented any such treatment. Ruth caught a glimpse of the man running after her, but she knew that she could soon out-distance him. Dollie demanded all her attention, for she had broken into a run. Ruth soon understood the truth of Sam's remark, "She can pull on the reins like all possessed, the critter can." There was no stopping her this time, for Dollie was thoroughly aroused; all Ruth could do was to guide the excited animal a little as they went flying over the level road. Fortunately they met no teams, and Ruth's good strong muscles served her well, so she was able to prevent a runaway.

Sam was watching for her return; he was horrified when he saw Dollie come dashing into the yard, barely escaping the doctor's vehicle that stood near the gate. He caught the foaming horse by the bridle and soon quieted her; then turned his attention to Ruth, who sat clinging to the reins.

"Why, you're as white as a ghost," lifting her out of the buggy. "So she played you a trick, did she! I'd have jerked her old jaws off; but you've good pluck!"

Ruth's hands were blistered, her wrists lame, and when she attempted to walk she thought that she had lost her legs. But she dragged herself to the house and sank into a chair.



"She is going to faint," said Mrs. Hart, putting her arm around her tenderly.

But Ruth shook her head and laughed; she was not of the fainting kind.

"You see, doctor, she was tired out when she started. She is dreadfully overworked; she cannot stand this much longer," said the kind woman.

The doctor looked at Ruth critically. "No; it is too much for such a young girl. Mrs. Avery must get some one to come and stay the rest of the time. It may be several weeks yet before the old lady can be around to do much of anything herself."

When Ruth could get her breath, and recover a little from the dizzy feeling in her head, she gave them a thrilling little account of her ride home, ending by saying,

"Anyway, I've got grandma's money all safe. That old tramp would have had a hard time getting that away from me," with a determined shake of the head that amused the doctor.

"Well, I am glad you did not lose the money," was Mrs. Avery's comment; "if you had only been content to come home the way you went nothing would have happened. But girls will be girls to the end of the chapter, I suppose."



That evening, before Mrs. Hart left, she had a long talk with Mrs. Avery. "Why not send for Amy to come and stay with you until you are well and strong? Her girls are grown up, so she could leave home, and I presume she would be glad to come." Now Amy—Mrs. Wardell—was Mrs. Avery's step-daughter, who lived in a distant part of the state.

"Oh—Amy! She is not of much account for work; she is too easy-going; I do n't call her a capable woman, and never did. She is not a bit like me. Now Ruth is a chip of the old block, I begin to believe."

"Amy is a nice housekeeper and has brought up her family well. Then she is good and kind and has plenty of money; I am sure she would help you gladly, if she knew just how you were situated."

"I don't want any assistance," said the proud old lady; "I am independent. But Amy is kind; she would be good to me, and take good care of Ruth if she were sick, as I fear she may be. Yes; you may write and ask her if she can come."

Thus it happened that one afternoon not long after this the omnibus from the station brought to the door a sweet motherly-looking woman, with a wealth of pretty gray hair and soft brown eyes, that Ruth fell in love with at



the first glance. She had a good-sized trunk; evidently she had come to stay as long as she was needed.

Ruth clapped her hands with delight as she realized that another would take from her shoulders the care and responsibility that had grown to be such a heavy burden. But she did not imagine what a messenger of love and mercy this same dear woman would be to her soul; had she realized this she certainly would have felt that they were taking an angel under their roof when they welcomed Mrs. Wardell to their home.



## CHAPTER X.

RUTH had not seen Mrs. Wardell, or "Aunt Amy," as she loved to call her from the first, since she was a very little girl. She had an indistinct but very pleasant impression of her father's half-sister.

"Can this be my little Ruth, grown so tall and large?" asked Mrs. Wardell in her sweetly musical voice as she came into the house. Then taking Ruth's face between her hands, and kissing it over and over, "Your eyes, dear, are just like your father's, but there is much about you that reminds me of your mother. Oh, Ruth, I did love your mother; she was a blessed woman."

This tribute to the sainted mother beloved was a ready passport into Ruth Avery's heart. From the first moment she felt that she had found a true friend. At bedtime, when Mrs. Wardell took her in her arms, big girl as she was, and caressed her, Ruth cried with delight. It seemed to her poor heart, "so home-sick for mamma," that it must be that her own dear mother had come back to earth.



"You will be a mother to me; wont you, Aunt Amy?"

"Indeed I will. You poor dear child, have you been pining for mother-love all these years!"

They were sitting in the kitchen, in the dim twilight. To Ruth, with those loving arms around her, the room seemed a veritable heaven.

Mrs. Avery, all arranged for the night, realized already that her step-daughter had great capabilities for making one comfortable, if for nothing else. Mrs. Wardell, with the quick eye of a born nurse, saw at once many things that needed to be done, and did them in a quiet, deft way that was refreshing to the nervous woman.

"You should have sent for me before, mother. Ruth has done well, but she could not give you necessary attention and do all the work." Mrs. Wardell installed herself in the little room by her mother, and sent Ruth to her own chamber. For the first time since her grandmother's accident she could quietly take up her mother's little Bible without listening for the sharp ring or call that would summon her down stairs. Her prayer that night was full of thanksgiving.

The next morning when Ruth came down



a little late, refreshed by her long, unbroken sleep, she found the breakfast nearly ready. A general air of peacefulness seemed to fill the house. Ruth thought that never before had she seen such a restful expression on her grandmother's face. Aunt Amy, in her neat morning dress and white apron, with her placid face, tender eyes, and gentle manners, seemed to Ruth like a being from another sphere who had dropped down into their habitation.

"I did not mean to be so late," said Ruth, after a loving greeting from Aunt Amy.

"I intended you should be; you must sleep all you can, and be out in the air, until you get the roses back in your cheeks."

"But how did you know where to find everything?"

"Oh, Samuel was ready to tell me all that I needed to know—and more," with a merry twinkle in her eyes. "Now I will give mother her breakfast, then we will have ours. Does the man eat with us?"

"Yes, he does when grandmother is around."

"Then call him, so he can be all ready."

"Now, Sam, you must make yourself as neat as possible, for Aunt Amy is very dainty."

"You bet I will; she's one of the jewels, I guess."

"I'm sure she is," laughed Ruth.



When they were seated at table, before Sam's tongue was unloosed, Mrs. Wardell bowed her head and in a few words thanked God for his good gifts. "And we never thank him!" thought Ruth.

This, with Aunt Amy's gentle dignity, had a quieting effect upon Sam; he had little to say. But Mrs. Wardell talked cheerily, while her sunny smile brightened the very room. Ruth thought it a very happy meal.

After breakfast Mrs. Wardell put her arm around Ruth. "Come, dear, we will go into mother's room for morning prayer." Mrs. Avery looked astonished at the proposal but she did not object, although she thought of the neglected dishes.

"Get your Bible, Ruth, and you and I will do the reading," and together they read a short, beautiful Psalm. Then in a few earnest words Mrs. Wardell spoke to her Heavenly Father as though he were a loved and intimate friend. She thanked him for the safety of the night and for the light of the morning,

"For rest and food and loving care,  
And all that makes the day so fair."

She sought his guidance in all the duties and experiences of this new day, and asked him to ward off every danger and temptation. Through it all was a boundless trust in God's infinite love



and in his willingness and ability to perfect in each one of their hearts and lives the beautiful image of Christ, the Master.

The short prayer voiced every want and need of Ruth's young heart. To her dying day she never forgot that service in her grandmother's room the first morning of Aunt Amy's stay.

If Mrs. Wardell had not her mother's "faculty" for work she had a magical way of disposing of it, without frettings or scoldings, that made it only a pleasure to Ruth. She gave the rooms a pretty, home-like look by dainty touches here and there that Ruth's beauty-loving eyes saw at once and appreciated. It transformed even the parlor, that was opened and used daily, to Ruth's great joy.

Mrs. Wardell was constantly devising ways of making her mother more comfortable. The first day after her arrival she sent Sam to the village for a different bed, and before night, with his help and that of Peggy, Mrs. Avery was transferred to her new resting-place, and was greatly delighted with the change.

"Aunt Peggy, what do you think of my new auntie?" asked Ruth.

"Oh, she's a honey; but I don't want her to catch me doing wrong things: her solemn eyes 'ud frighten me more than all your granny's scoldin'."



Ruth laughed, then said very earnestly, "But, Peggy, you and I mean to do right. You *do* try; do n't you?"

"Yes, child; but it's hard work. Satan, he's strong and very deceivin'. Old Satan likes to make us lie and steal."

"But do n't you know what I told you about asking Jesus to help you? He's stronger than Satan."

"I believe he is. I do think you's right 'bout that."



## CHAPTER XI.

DURING the weeks of Mrs. Wardell's stay grace was said at every meal and prayer offered every morning in Mrs. Avery's room. Indeed, Grandma Avery grew to love the hallowed half-hour and no longer regretted the lost time. She felt that it brought a blessing upon the day and sweet peace to her heart. She decided in her own mind, "When Amy goes I will try to recognize my God by daily family prayer."

Often in the Bible readings Mrs. Wardell questioned Ruth, and she was astonished to find how little the girl knew of Bible truth or Bible history. "Do you not read the Bible regularly?" she asked one morning when she and Ruth were washing the dishes.

"No, Aunt Amy. I have tried to, since grandma's accident. I like to read the verses in mamma's Bible that are marked and that I'm sure she used to love. But I know the Commandments and the Catechism. I could say them backward, I do believe, and upside down."

Mrs. Wardell laughed, as did Ruth. "They are good to know, dear; but you must not stop



there. You surely study your Sunday-school lessons?"

"Oh, yes, when I go; but, you see, I can't go in bad weather; grandma will not let me walk, and she would think it a sin to send Dollie out in the storm. I can't go to day-school much, in the winter."

Mrs. Wardell saw daily evidences that Ruth was not getting the education that she needed, and she had already a plan in mind for something better for the orphan girl. "Over the tea-cups" many of Ruth's faults of speech and of manner were corrected, but in such a gentle, often laughing way that it did not rouse her anger nor opposition. Her constant use of the adjectives "dreadful," "awful," "splendid," and of "have got," "which is neither proper nor elegant," was Mrs. Wardell's point of attack one morning. Ruth took the kind hints and remembered them.

Ruth learned more in some things during those weeks spent with her bright, sunny-hearted aunt than she had ever learned before in all her short life.

Mrs. Wardell often enlivened the work by telling of her own daughters—their school and home life, or by drawing Ruth out to tell of her school and of her young friends, of the things she loved to do and of those she "hated" to do,



until this wise woman, who "understood girls," knew just where this one needed loving help and guidance.

But it was the evening hours that Ruth enjoyed the most, when, everything done and Mrs. Avery dozing, she and her "dear Aunt Amy" could stroll out in the garden or sit on the piazza in the long June twilights.

Then, with those sweet eyes looking into her face, she could tell all her heart-trouble as to a dear mother. She hid nothing from those gentle, true eyes, but told of all her struggles and temptations, of her careless habits, "that are such a torment to grandma," and of her worst fault—her fiery temper.

One evening she told her aunt of the time, "when mamma was living," when she thought she was a Christian; how wicked and remiss she had been since, and how of late she had been trying to serve God, but how hard she found it to do right and to be patient.

Mrs. Wardell listened with deep interest. "My dear girl," she exclaimed, drawing Ruth close to her heart, "give up the battle, and let your Saviour fight for you. Go back to the simple faith and trust of childhood."

"Give up the battle, Aunt Amy? Give up, and get angry when grandma says and does provoking things?"



“Yes, dear, give up trying in your own strength. When these temptations come, just lift your heart to God your Saviour, saying, ‘Do for me what I am too weak to do for myself!’ You know you told me of the advice of your friend, Annie Stedman, about asking Jesus’ help. Not only ask his help, but expect it, and leave it for him to do.”

“How plain and easy you make it all; if I could only have you with me all the time I could be a Christian. You draw out the good in me and quiet the naughtiness.”

Mrs. Wardell smiled. “I suppose that is because we love each other. I cannot stay with you much longer, but I leave you with a better Friend; One who will stay close by your side and One who loves you far better than I do. He can help you as I cannot; he can make you strong and patient. You must learn to be patient with yourself as well as with other people. If you fail one day do not be angry with yourself, but begin afresh the next day. Remember how forbearing Christ is with you, and do not be discouraged.”

The weeks of Mrs. Wardell’s stay were drawing to an end. Mrs. Avery was no longer a prisoner in her room, but was able to move about the house on crutches, and her daughter felt that home duties demanded her attention.



One lovely morning, just before her departure, Aunt Amy and Ruth had a delightful ride to the village. While Mrs. Wardell was doing some shopping she sent Ruth to invite Annie Stedman to return with them and spend the day.

This was a rare treat for Ruth, a whole day's visit from her loved friend. The day proved to be a delight to both young girls. Aunt Amy declined Ruth's assistance in the house, and sent them out to wander in the woods and fields while she prepared delicious meals for them, which were all in readiness when they came in tired and hungry. She was delighted to see how rosy and bright Ruth looked that evening, and Ruth was delighted to see how fond of each other Aunt Amy and Annie had become.

That night, when Ruth went to her room, she found on her table a couple of sweet little religious books, several story-books and papers, and some ribbons and ornaments. It was such a happy surprise that she rushed down stairs to her grandmother to show her treasures. "Only see, grandma; Aunt Amy knows what girls like!"

"It is all foolishness; you will spoil her, Amy. Those story-books will just turn her head," in the old sharp tone.

"No, mother," said Mrs. Wardell gently,



"you are mistaken; young people must have some food of this kind."

Grandma Avery softened in a moment. "Perhaps you are right, Amy," and she examined the pretty books with real pleasure.

"How changed grandma is," thought Ruth; "I believe she is a real, true Christian." And Mrs. Avery was changed, for her wandering feet had returned to the long-neglected Saviour. She often showed real affection for her daughter and for Ruth.

"Grandma will love me now, and I shall be happy," said Ruth to her aunt.

In a few days Mrs. Wardell had to leave; the last prayer was offered, the good-byes spoken. With tearful eyes Ruth watched the omnibus drive away with this loved friend and counsellor. But the sunshine was left behind. Aunt Amy had opened a new world to our struggling little maiden; a world where faith, hope, and love made the victory over a fiery temper seem near and easy.

She did not know then that her kind aunt had arranged to have her come to them, another year, to attend school and have the good influences of a refined Christian home.

After Ruth had watched and waved until Mrs. Wardell was out of sight she ran up to her room to hide her tearful face. There she found



some parting gifts from "dear Aunt Amy:" a wicker rocking-chair, sundry pretty fixings for her room, and, best of all, a handsome Bible marked with her name; on a slip of paper tucked between the leaves were these words: "Ruth Avery's guide-book to the heavenly land." Ruth cried over them, but they were happy tears.

When she came down she found her grandmother looking very sad and disconsolate. She put her arms around her neck, kissing her, and saying, "But I will care for you now, dear grandma."

The undemonstrative old lady clasped the girl to her heart, murmuring words of tender endearment. Then Ruth went about her work singing joyously. Sure of her grandmother's love, and of the love of her Saviour, the world looked very bright to her, even if "dear Aunt Amy" had departed.



## CHAPTER XII.

OVER a year has passed, and again we find Ruth Avery washing the breakfast dishes in Grandma Avery's neat kitchen. She is the same Ruth, only grown a little taller, with the same flashing black eyes, and brown hair that curls as tightly as ever in spite of Mrs. Avery's heroic treatment. "Crinkle it will," Ruth often says, laughingly, "just like mamma's, only hers was soft and silky, and not all of a frizzle like mine." As usual, she is singing or talking to herself as she works.

"Oh, I'm so happy, so happy to think that to-morrow I'm going on a long journey; going to see my Aunt Amy, and stay with her a whole year. I can hardly wait for the hours to go," glancing up at the old clock. "How much I shall have to tell her, and how many confessions to make," and a sober look clouds the bright young face for a moment. "But she will help me, dear blessed Aunt Amy!" breaking out into song.

Mrs. Avery walked into the room and pushed Ruth aside. "I will wash and you can wipe, so we can get through quickly and go up and pack



your trunk. I do not believe in leaving everything to the last moment."

"Oh, the packing's nearly done already."

"It is, is it? well you'd better believe that I am going to see just what goes into that trunk and how it is put in; you do not know anything about careful packing." Then with a sigh, "It seems to me you feel very happy about leaving your old grandmother."

"No, not that exactly," in some confusion, "but I do want to see Aunt Amy."

"Yes, I suppose so, and you will come back with your head chuck full of nonsensical notions. I have been sorry a great many times that I ever said you could go. You will be just spoiled by all their petting and foolishness. The first thing your Aunt Amy will want to do will be to rig you out with a lot of new dresses, some of her girls' toggery perhaps, all made up in the latest style. I know how she decks out her girls. Now you have clothes good enough for any place; plain, warm, and sensible; just the thing for a child like you, and you must wear your own things. You are no pauper; I can get you all that is necessary."

"Why, of course, grandma; I don't want her to do any such thing; my dresses are nice, and Aunt Amy has got poor folks enough to clothe without me."



"Now I am glad to hear you say that. You have plenty of my pride and sturdy independence; I hope you will stick to your point; be a little woman, and not a child carried away with everything you see and hear."

"I'll try, grandma; try my very best."

After the washing of the dishes followed the repacking of the trunk, and before this was finished Ruth was thoroughly exasperated.

"Now this is all the sheerest nonsense, Ruth Avery; what under the sun are you going to do with all this trumpery?" throwing out little packages and boxes. "And this big old atlas; what on earth is this for?"

"Oh, grandma, don't touch my treasures," Ruth cried.

"Now, Ruth, you are not going to have the space filled up with such a lot of truck," continuing the process of casting out things contraband.

Ruth saw with dismay that the precious work of the summer was on the verge of destruction—the pressed flowers, ferns, and brilliant autumn leaves; the pretty red berries, dried grasses, bits of rare moss, and, choicest of all, some exquisitely beautiful little birds' eggs that she had found in a forsaken nest. She had gathered and prepared them with such delight "for dear Aunt Amy, who loves them just as I do, and has noth-



ing of the kind around her city home." And now to lose them!

"And if here is not a lot of stones! Why, child, are you crazy?" taking out some lovely pebbles and pieces of curious rock. "Now I'll pack this trunk without all this stuff."

Ruth's eyes flashed; the color flamed into her face, and she stamped her foot furiously, a thing she had not done in months. "You shall not take them out! I will carry them! You are mean and cruel." The prayer marked out by Aunt Amy, "Set a watch before my mouth, keep the door of my lips," was not offered; the door-keeping was forgotten, and out came the wicked, angry words. Then in her excitement she burst out crying.

"Why, Ruth! Do not be a baby. What do you intend to do with all this trumpery? I should really like to know."

"It's all for Aunt Amy; it's all I can give her. She loves these woodsy things. I thought we'd have such fun looking at them and talking about them; she can tell me so many interesting things about them," sobbed Ruth.

"Why, if you feel so bad about it," said Mrs. Avery more gently, "you can take them; I can find places. But they will want better packing than yours or they will be ground to powder before the end of the journey—unless it is the



stones," with a laugh. "I will fix them all right. Now bring me all your things and watch me pack them, so you will know how to put them in when you come home. For your aunt can't show you; she is not of the practical kind. I want you to help me with ever so many things to-day. You will be gone a year and I shall miss your help," with another sigh. "I fear that girl who is coming will not be of much account."

"Perhaps I ought not to go, grandma; I'm sorry I got so angry," very penitently.

"I am sorry, too; I hope you will learn in time. I suppose it is best for you to go; Amy can help you in many ways where I cannot. But do take good care of your clothes and do not get into any of your old careless ways. I think in that respect you are much improved."

Before the packing was finished Ruth's spirits returned, although she came near another outburst when Mrs. Avery asked rather spitefully, "What do you want of two Bibles? One is enough, I should think."

But she managed to reply quite gently, "I want my own, that Aunt Amy gave me, and I want mamma's because it is full of her marks."

As they were leaving the room Ruth noticed



how sad and sober Mrs. Avery's face looked. She was tempted to say, "I will not leave you; I am sorry to go," but how could she when her very heart leaped for joy at the thought of getting away, and of being with her loved aunt in her beautiful home!



## CHAPTER XIII.

IT had been a hard, trying year for this undisciplined little maiden. When Mrs. Avery fully recovered the use of her limbs and was able to look after the ways of her own household she found much to vex her neat, orderly soul. Many things had been neglected or forgotten. Ruth, Peggy and even Sam all came in for a share of her condemnation. Nothing had been done quite right. With returning strength came back the old fire and energy; again she became hard and exacting. Pantry and closet must be ferreted out; the house must have a thorough "going over," and in every room many things were wrong, to say nothing of garret and cellar.

"Your granny's got a mighty faculty for work, she has," remarked Peggy. "She's goin' to make up for lost time. I did s'pose she'd mostly done drivin' so hard, but she's at it again wuss 'an ever, an' jist as 'zasperatin' as ever, she is." Ruth could not but agree with Peggy's verdict.

At first she struggled for patience, and prayed daily—and hourly, it seemed to her, some days;



she tried to comfort herself by recalling her grandmother's words of affection during her illness. During the fall there was so much hard work to be done that school days were few, and through the winter storms often kept Ruth at home. She grew discouraged and petulant under constant fault-finding. Was it strange that she longed for Aunt Amy, and for the happy home where it would be so easy to be gentle, patient, and good-tempered? Alas! she found that the victory over herself was not yet won; that it was a harder battle than it seemed as she sat with her beloved aunt in the twilight and talked of God's love and care. Then his service looked so easy and inviting.

There was one little bright spot in each day: Mrs. Avery kept up the family prayer that Mrs. Wardell had established. A very hurried service it was sometimes, when there was much to be done, but often the softness and gentleness—the loveliness—of those days of sickness were in Mrs. Avery's voice and words; then Ruth felt like kissing her grandmother and forgiving the sharpness of her tongue. To church they went, too, every pleasant Sabbath, much to Sam's discomfiture, for "Sundays is rest time for poor beasts," he often said. But when Mrs. Avery spoke in her decided way, "Sam, harness up Dollie," he knew that protest was useless.



One evening early in October Ruth found herself in the delightful home of Mrs. Wardell—the “paradise” of which she had so often dreamed. Early that morning she had said her laughing good-byes to Sam, Peggy, and Dollie, and a tender one at the station to dear Annie Stedman, and started on her long journey under the care of a kind friend. The day had been full of pleasant novelty, as the cars sped along through a new and beautiful country. Still the remembrance of her grandmother’s tearful face and her loving words at parting gave her an occasional heartache. One thing that Mrs. Avery had said startled her every time she recalled it, and dampened her enthusiasm over the scenery for a few moments. Putting her hand on Ruth’s shoulder she said very tenderly, but earnestly, “I do hope that your Aunt Amy can help you to overcome that temper of yours; it worries me. It is the one thing that makes me willing to have you go. But do not depend upon her alone; you need God’s aid.”

It was the first time Mrs. Avery had ever spoken to her of this fault; it hurt and frightened her. “Am I growing worse?” she asked herself. Then she would feel indignant, and excuse herself: “Grandma’s to blame, too, she is so ‘zasperatin’,” as Aunt Peggy says; it will all come right when I’m with dear Aunt Amy.”



She was welcomed with delight by Mrs. Wardell and her family, and taken into their hearts and home. She did not feel like a stranger among them, she had heard her aunt speak of them all so often. The daughters—May and Belle—two lovely young ladies almost ready to graduate, won her heart at once by their sweet gentle manners. And when Uncle James Wardell, in the evening prayer, thanked God for her safe arrival, and asked his blessing most earnestly upon “the dear little maiden who has come to abide under our roof,” her heart went out to him with new affection.

This pretty house with its artistic but simple furnishings, the supper table with its dainty appointments and Aunt Amy's sweet face behind the tea-urn, seemed like a new world to Ruth, after her plain surroundings. The bright, beauty-loving eyes took it all in with delight: books, pictures and—best of all—a piano. But the great charm of that home was the general air of peace and joy that seemed a very part of the dwelling itself, and which she breathed in the moment she entered. It was a *home* in the truest, holiest sense of the word.

Mrs. Wardell proposed that Ruth retire early. When they were alone in the pretty little room designed for Ruth she threw her arms around her aunt's neck exclaiming, “Oh, dear Aunt



Amy, I'm so glad to see you; *so* glad! I cannot tell you how glad. Am I too big to sit in your lap, as I used to a year ago?"

"No, dear, no," drawing her to her motherly breast. "And I am just as glad to see my darling Ruth; she seems like one of my own daughters."

The petting and the tender, loving words completely upset Ruth; she burst into tears, the first she had shed that day, but they were joyful ones. "Poor starved little heart, so hungry for a little love," thought Mrs. Wardell, fondling and quieting her. Soon Ruth's eyes were shining again, and her tongue loosened to tell all that was on her mind.

"Oh, Aunt Amy, I've so much to tell you; so many sorry confessions to make!"

"I dare say, dear, but not to-night. You have had a long journey and are weary and excited. You must go to bed now and rest. There are many long days coming when you and I can talk to our hearts' content."

Soon this very tired and very happy girl was fast asleep and dreaming of a beautiful place she thought was heaven, but the angel faces were wondrously like the faces of the family in the room below, just then talking lovingly of its new member. "Why, mamma, you did not tell us how pretty she was," said



Belle ; "her eyes are so bright, and her brown curly hair so lovely. If she were becomingly dressed she would be a beauty."

"Yes, her dress is a little antiquated, but that can soon be changed ; mother has some prim ideas about dressing young girls," said Mrs. Wardell.

"And she is smart," broke in May, "I am sure. She said some keen things about her journey ; evidently her eyes had been wide open all the way. Then how much at home she seems with us all. Oh, we shall love her."

"And spoil her, perhaps," interrupted Mr. Wardell.

"No," said his wife. "I do not think that love can spoil Ruth. I think it will only make her blossom out beautifully."



## CHAPTER XIV.

RUTH awoke the next morning with a start, and as she saw the sunshine exclaimed, "It must be late; how grandma will scold!" Then as her eyes opened wider she sprang out of bed with a little shout. "Why, I'm in Aunt Amy's lovely home and this is my pretty room that she has fixed all up for me. Oh, I'm so glad!" throwing up her hands with a gesture of delight. Then she walked around the room, examining all its dainty arrangements, its furniture—all white and gilt. "Oh, Aunt Amy knew just what would suit me. How good and kind she is!"

She did love pretty things—as all girls do, or should; if they do not there is something wrong in their make-up or the depressing circumstances of their lives have crowded out this natural love of the beautiful. To Ruth Avery that morning her charming little room seemed a veritable fairy bower. Mrs. Wardell had evidently been in, for the dresses were taken from the trunk and hung in the closet. Nothing else had been disturbed excepting her Bible, which lay on a small table beside a vase of fragrant flowers. At the



sight of it she dropped upon her knees and thanked God for all his goodness. She washed and dressed herself neatly, for she had very tidy habits, due to her grandmother's persistent training. She had improved wonderfully in carefulness and thoughtfulness under the discipline of the past year, as Mrs. Wardell soon discovered.

Ruth was just ready to leave her room when Aunt Amy tapped softly at her door and then came in with a joyful "Good-morning." "How delightful it is to see you, Aunt Amy," throwing her arms around her aunt, and looking fondly into the sweet placid face set in its halo of gray curls; "your face is just like sunshine."

"I am glad, dear, if that is so; the children of the Heavenly King should always shine. I did not call you, for you needed the sleep. Come now and have some breakfast. The girls and Harry have gone to school, and your uncle has to go early to his business."

Ruth enjoyed the delicious meal—which she had not helped to cook—with a healthy girl's good appetite. Mrs. Wardell sat by, sipping a cup of coffee and talking in her own lovely way, occasionally throwing in some gentle hints about table-manners and etiquette which Ruth was quick to take. "Why is it," she queried silently, "that Aunt Amy's advice, or even re-



proof, never angers me, when often a word from Grandma Avery makes me mad?" She did not try to answer the puzzling question that just flitted through her mind, but sat and sunned herself in Aunt Amy's sweet smile, that was brighter to her than the sunlight that flooded the pleasant dining-room.

Mrs. Wardell said that she did not think Ruth had better commence school for a week or so, thus giving her opportunity to get acquainted and accustomed to her new surroundings. "And who is this Harry I saw at the tea-table last evening?" asked Ruth. "He does not seem to belong to any of you."

Mrs. Wardell laughed. "No, he is different, but he is a Wardell. He is a friendless orphan boy whose father was a distant relation. He was alone in the world, with no kind grandmother to take him in, and a few months ago we offered him a home with us."

"Is he nice, Aunt Amy?" with a little disagreeable feeling as she thought of the laughing eyes that seemed to look mockingly at her across the supper-table.

"Yes," with a smile, "as boys go; but we have never been accustomed to boys and he seems very noisy and untamed. He is very bright, and running over with fun; he has plenty of faults, but he is warm-hearted and grateful. He



is about a year older than you are. I hope you will be good friends; you can help him in many ways."

Then after breakfast Mrs. Wardell led Ruth through the house, showing her the different apartments. "Oh, Aunt Amy, it is all so pretty! The girls' rooms are lovely and the air is so sweet, and so soft and warm," for growing plants and flowers were in many of the windows and the whole building was heated by steam. But when they came to Ruth's own snug little retreat she exclaimed delightedly, "I do believe this is the best of all, with its lovely white furniture! I hope I shall not soil it by my carelessness."

"Mary has arranged it for you this morning, but generally you will do this part yourself."

"Of course, Aunt Amy; it will be just fun to keep such a room in spick-and-span array."

"I do not doubt that you will keep it in the nicest kind of order, for you have more tidy habits than most girls of your age; for which you may thank your good Grandma Avery."

"But what if I should spill ink on this dainty stand! Grandma says I'm always having 'ink-scrapes.' It is the most provoking stuff; always leaving its black tracks just where you don't want them."

"Oh, you must be very careful," laughed



Mrs. Wardell, for Ruth's face had such a look of consternation, at the very thought, that it was comical.

Then the trunk had to be unpacked, and Mrs. Wardell helped Ruth arrange her under-clothing in the little white bureau. "I can tell you, Aunt Amy, I have spent some doleful hours sewing on those things! but I had to make them myself or stay at home. 'Oh, for a sewing-machine!' I used to sigh."

"Well, I have one, Ruth, and you shall be taught its mysteries, so you can make clothing enough to last you for years," giving the young girl's rosy cheeks a pinch.

When they came to the woodsy treasures—which were intact, thanks to Mrs. Avery's care—Mrs. Wardell's unfeigned interest and delight gave Ruth unbounded pleasure.

"Why, Ruth, dear child, how did you ever preserve these flowers, ferns and leaves so beautifully? They are lovely; how the girls will enjoy them, and want to paint them on china!"

"Why, Aunt Amy, getting these things together has been my only fun all summer;" but she did not tell how near they came to being left behind. Neither did she tell just then how angry she had been with her grandmother over these frail things, but the remembrance gave her a moment's pang. She was almost afraid to



open the box of birds' eggs, but she found them perfect, for Mrs. Avery had packed them carefully in cotton.

"Oh, how exquisite! Why, Ruth, you could not have brought me anything that would give me more delight than these tokens from woods and fields." Even the bits of moss and the despised "rocks" were prized, and drew out from Mrs. Wardell some very interesting information, as Ruth was certain they would.

Ruth and her aunt were alike in their love for the country and in their keen zest for nature and all its wonderful products. Mrs. Wardell was one who found homilies in stones and running brooks; so they spent a delightful and profitable hour or more over Ruth's "treasures." All winter she had the pleasure of seeing many of these pretty specimens—tastefully arranged in handsome vases by her cousins—a source of enjoyment to the household and a stimulus to many entertaining conversations; while many of the leaves and ferns—and some of the ferns were rare ones—were utilized by May and Belle in their painting.

The lunch bell interrupted the long session, and Ruth went bounding down stairs with a happier heart than she had carried for months.



## CHAPTER XV.

THAT evening after going to bed, Mrs. Wardell coming to her room to say good-night, Ruth opened her heart to this loving, congenial friend and counsellor, telling of all the struggles, temptations and failures of the past year. "Oh, Aunt Amy, I got *so* discouraged the last of the time that I was sure I could not be a Christian; I just stopped praying and reading my Bible; it did n't seem to be of any use, for every day I got angry in spite of myself. Seems to me grandma never was so provoking as she has been lately, or else I'm worse. I began to think it was all a mistake about her loving me one bit; but when I came away she looked very sad, and she spoke many kind words to me.

"Now, Aunt Amy, what am I to do? My temper's no better. I think it is worse than ever. Is it my fault, or grandma's?"

Mrs. Wardell laid her head on Ruth's pillow and put her arm tenderly around the young girl. "My dear child, I am so sorry you gave up praying and reading your Bible. I expected you would fail a great many times, but I did not



expect this. I thought you had more faith in God's power and willingness to help you."

"I thought so, too, Aunt Amy, when you left me ; but when I was there all alone, and grandma got so hard and snappish, my faith did n't seem of much account. I tried so many times, but failed so often, that even Peggy would say, 'Whar's that 'ligion you thought you got?' Then I'd rush to my room and cry. After a while I did n't care. When I came away grandma said she hoped you and God would help me get the better of my temper ; she never said such a thing as that to me before in all my life.

"I did n't go to school much, so did not see much of Annie Stedman. Often I did n't stay to Sunday-school, for grandma went to church and wanted me to ride home with her, so I had no help."

"No help? I see, my dear Ruth. Satan was not going to let you get the victory over such a fault without a fierce battle. When you found you could not cope with him you just retreated and he had the field, instead of trusting the dear Saviour to fight for you and win the day. My poor little lambkin, what could you do with your puny strength? I can see how hard it has all been for you, and I am very sorry, but perhaps you have learned the bitter lesson of your own



weakness; now you must learn the glorious one of God's strength."

With loving words of encouragement and hope she urged Ruth to forget all the sad past but its teachings—and to begin anew, keeping daily near to Jesus, where his helping hand could be reached at any moment. In her heart Mrs. Wardell thought that her mother's unwise treatment was responsible, in some measure, for Ruth's failures; she also thought that Ruth's judgment of herself was too severe, for she had never seen the child in one of her storms of passion and supposed that her fault was only the hasty impatience of a high-spirited girl. But Ruth Avery knew herself better than did this charitable, loving aunt.

This first week of Ruth's stay in her "paradise" was one long delight; there were so many things new and wonderful to be enjoyed. The days were spent with Mrs. Wardell, seeing the sights of the beautiful city of R——, the evenings were made charming by music, reading and pictures, etherealized by the atmosphere of love and peace that filled this happy Christian home. How barren, cold and comfortless looked the old life, which already began to seem far in the past. "How easy to be good in such a lovely place," was often her thought; her morning and evening prayers were one



thanksgiving; a true and earnest purpose to be a faithful child of the heavenly Father filled her heart; penitently and earnestly she sought pardon for the past and strength for the future.

One morning, the latter part of the week, Mrs. Wardell came to Ruth's room to look over her rather scanty wardrobe. Already she had purchased a winter hat and cloak for Sunday wear at Mrs. Avery's request, who had written a note inclosing a small check for the purpose; to this Mrs. Wardell had added a little, unknown to Ruth, that she might get nice, substantial, yet tasty articles.

"Well, Ruth dear, I see that you will need a couple of new dresses, and these old ones will need a little altering and modernizing."

Ruth's face grew scarlet; her grandmother's words of advice and command flashed into her mind. "Aunt Amy, you have used all the money grandma sent; have n't you?"

"Yes, dear, but I shall be glad to get you anything you need."

"Grandma says I'm not a pauper; she can get me clothes. You have got—I mean, you have ways enough for all your money."

"That is foolish talk, Ruth."

"Are n't my dresses good enough for any place? Grandma says they are."

"I suppose they are, Ruth; they are of good



quality and sensible, but not quite the thing for a young girl; they could be altered a little so as to make them tasteful and pretty. You know, Ruth, you are in the city now, and things are different from the country."

"Aunt Amy, I'm nothing but a little girl. I don't want all the—" toggery, she almost said—"nice things that your daughters have, for they are young ladies. I like my own clothes and I'd rather wear them just as they are. I don't want to be dressed up like a doll."

Mrs. Wardell looked into the flushed, excited face and smiled.

"Well, Miss Independence, if you feel that way we will not do anything about it just at present." Then more soberly, "You may change your mind later on; if you do, let me know."

The next week Ruth commenced school, and was soon intensely interested in her studies. As Mrs. Wardell's niece she was welcomed by teachers and scholars. She had to enter a grade where the pupils were a little younger than herself, but her quickness and brightness soon won her favor with her teachers and promised speedy promotion. Her life and fun, her readiness to help her roommates in their lessons or their play, soon made her popular with them; being older than the others she soon became a leader and an authority in any little contro-



versies. The drawing-lessons were her delight, and she showed real talent in this direction. Her music, too, she enjoyed, for May had commenced teaching her out of school hours, although, as she said, her fingers were as "stiff as pokers."

"But your voice is not," laughed May; "that is very sweet and flexible, and the fingers will soon grow limber."

"How bright she is!" said May to her mother; "with none of the shyness and awkwardness you might expect from a girl brought up in an isolated country place. But, mamma, do dress her up a little; she looks as antiquated as a little old woman."

Mrs. Wardell laughed. "I know it. All in good time. She says she does not want to be 'dressed up like a doll.' She has a mind of her own and a will of her own—a stronger one than I supposed."

"Yes, I have found that out; she is a character, and will make a splendid woman."

"I think she will, if she only seeks heavenly guidance."

But Ruth herself did not give her dress a thought; she was so happy that her face fairly shone. "My being here with you all seems like a beautiful dream, too good to be true," she declared to her aunt.



## CHAPTER XVI.

THERE was only one member of that sweet Christian household that in a short time Ruth did not love, even to the servants: Mary, the ladylike dining-room girl, and Annie, the kind-hearted cook. That unfortunate person was Harry Wardell. "I don't like him; I'm afraid I never shall," she confided to her aunt. "His laughing eyes always seem to be making fun of me. I don't care if he does, but I do think he is a mean kind of a boy."

"Ruth, dear, you must remember that he is a poor orphan boy and has had no gentle loving training." Ruth did try to follow her aunt's advice and "remember."

One day she met him in the hall and he caught hold of her sleeve, which was small and old-fashioned. "Seems to me stuff must have been scarce when those sleeves were made. Guess that dress came out of the ark—one your grandmother used to wear when she was a girl!" with a provoking laugh.

Ruth was furious in a moment and completely thrown off her guard; her eyes flashed.



"It's none of your business what kind of dresses I wear, nor where they came from."

"Now, now, don't get mad nor nothing; I only asked a civil question," still laughing.

"You are the meanest boy I ever saw in all my life! Don't you dare to touch me again!"

"Am I though? Now I think you'd be awful nice if you were n't so peppery. Peppery Ruth I'm going to call you. Like the name?" he chuckled, and with this parting shot he disappeared out of a back door.

Ruth was angry in the regular old-fashioned way; as she had not been since she came to her "paradise," and as she did not suppose it was possible for her to be in that peaceful home. She rushed to her room, frightened, ashamed, and very indignant. On the stairs she met Mrs. Wardell. "What is it, dear? What is the matter?"

She clung to her aunt and drew her into the room. "Oh, Aunt Amy, that awful boy; he is so rude and so provoking!"

"You must not mind him, dear; he does not know any better; he does not mean to be unkind."

"But, Aunt Amy, he laughed at my sleeves, and asked if my dress came out of the ark, and if it were one my grandmother used to wear." Mrs. Wardell could not restrain a smile, "And



he called me names," dropping her eyes in confusion.

"What did he call you, Ruth?" very soberly.

"'Peppery Ruth,'" and her foot came down with an indignant stamp.

"Well, my dear child, it was rude; but you must not mind Harry; boys do love to tease, and it seems to be born in this one. The only way for you is not to mind him. As soon as he finds that you do not care he will stop it. Where is my brave, independent girl?"

"But oh, auntie, he made so angry; that is the worst part."

"Would you like me to tell him that you have a hasty temper, and that he must be careful about provoking you?"

"Oh no, no, I should not like that."

"Then how can I help you, Ruth?"

"Oh dear!" sobbed Ruth, "I thought I was so safe here."

"The trouble comes from within, my child. Wherever you go you will find things to vex and anger you. The only way is to lift up your heart to Jesus for help."

"But, Aunt Amy, it came so suddenly; before I thought I was all in a blaze."

The tears started in Mrs. Wardell's eyes and she drew Ruth to her. "I fear my poor child has more to contend with than I supposed; but



she must not be discouraged; the victory will soon be gained, for she has God's promise." Tenderly and lovingly she comforted and quieted her, saying smilingly as she left the room, "Look upon Harry as your one trial here, and pray for him as well as for yourself. We soon learn to like those for whom we pray. And be on guard; 'watch and pray' constantly."

This was the beginning of trouble for poor Ruth. Harry had discovered how explosive she was, and he could not resist the inclination to apply the match whenever the opportunity offered, tormenting her with a persistent mischievousness that was almost malicious. Sometimes he would take up the pepper-box and give a sly glance at her across the table: she would feel the blood mounting to her very hair as she thought of "Peppery Ruth."

Mrs. Wardell suspected how things were going, but she hoped that Ruth could win her own battle without any of her interference, and Ruth did "watch and pray." Often she could pass him without paying the least attention to his teasing remarks, but sometimes there was an independent toss of the curly head that seemed to amuse Harry more than any sharp retort could have done.

"How fine we do look in our Sunday-school rig!" he exclaimed one morning, as Ruth stood



in the hall, all ready for church, waiting for her cousins. "Now that's genuine citified; that's what I call stunning. Did n't buy that hat and cloak in your country store, I bet."

Ruth had come from her room with one particular verse of her Sunday-school lesson fresh in her mind—"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." "Not only the sorrows and troubles of others, but their faults and failings we are to help them to bear," was one of the teachings drawn from this verse in her quarterly.

"There is no one here," she thought, "that I can help; no one here has any troubles, no one here has any special faults and failings, unless it is Harry, and he has plenty, mercy knows! I must try to help him." But the irritating words put all her good resolutions out of mind. "How rude you are! Pity you had not been brought up in the country too, to learn some manners."

"Manners? country manners? I know a girl who forgets to eat with her fork about half the time. Guess she was brought up—or grewed—in the woods," with his rollicking but provoking laugh.

This touched Ruth on a sensitive spot, for she had found that her table manners had been sadly neglected in her grandmother's teaching. Her face grew very red, and the sweet, gentle



expression faded out from her flashing eyes. "Indeed! And I know a boy who crowds his mouth so full at the table that he can't speak; acts as though he were afraid he would not get his share. I overheard a gentleman I know asking him the other day at dinner—'Are you fighting fire?'"

This was Harry's turn to grow red in the face; he looked down in awkward embarrassment. It was the first time Ruth had noticed any such symptoms in him; she regretted her sharp words when she noticed his confusion. "He has not had even a grandmother's teachings," she thought. But just then her cousins appeared, and she went out with them sorry, ashamed, and lifting a prayer to Jesus to take all the angry feelings out of her heart.

That afternoon Mrs. Wardell, who had heard the war of words between the two, took Harry severely to task. "You are rude and unkind to Ruth, and I will not have it any longer; this must come to an end."

"Why, I do n't mean any harm, Aunt Amy," as he was privileged to call her; "she's so spunky I can't help it. You do n't know anything about it; why, the sparks fly out of those black eyes of hers just like an electric battery. Oh, it's such fun, I can't help touching 'em off," laughing at the thought.



Mrs. Wardell looked very sober. "‘Such fun,’ to make another sin! Is that your idea of fun, Harry? Do you know that we are accountable for the sins we lead others to commit and for the unhappiness we may cause them?"

Then Harry looked sober too, but warded off the questions by saying, "She can fight her own battles; she gives back as good as I send every time. She's a sharp one; I love to provoke her speeches; she can cut worse than I do—and she means it too!" thinking of the morning.

"Harry, Ruth is striving to serve Jesus; she wants to be his child and get the mastery over her temper; do you want to help, or to hinder her?"

"Oh, I don't know: she must look out for herself. That's what I have to do. It's all fun, anyway. Girls are so silly."

But after a long, faithful conversation Mrs. Wardell succeeded in touching the heart and awakening the latent manliness and nobleness of the boy. He gave his word of promise that he would cease teasing Ruth, "just as far as I possibly can." This conditional promise was enough, for Mrs. Wardell, knowing Harry as she did, felt sure it would be kept.



## CHAPTER XVII.

WHILE Mrs. Wardell was striving to convince the really kind-hearted Harry of the evil he was doing, Ruth, in her room, was undergoing a sifting process, bringing herself to judgment and condemning herself without much mercy. It seemed to her that she had never realized as she did that Sunday afternoon the sin of yielding to her hasty temper. "And how foolish I am," she said aloud, "to let Harry's teasing words make me so angry. I say such sharp things back. It was very tantalizing in me to say what I did about his eating. Of course boys eat more than girls, and faster; grandma used to say 'boys' stomachs are bottomless pits.'"

She thought of his shamefaced expression when she twitted him about Mr. Wardell's reproof that she happened to hear at the table. "He never said anything quite so mean as that to me." She sat thinking for some time very seriously, then jumping up and clapping her hands she exclaimed, "I know what I'm going to do: I'll make friends with Harry; I'll just ask him to forgive me for what I said this morning."



God alone knew what a victory over self this decision was for the proud, high-spirited girl; a little maiden's victory, but just as hard to win, and just as important in the Master's sight, as that of the oldest man or woman living.

With Ruth, to decide was to do. She came down stairs with a hop, a skip and a jump, her face shining with her new resolution, and singing a little hymn she had learned in Sunday-school years before:

“Never lose the golden rule;  
Keep it still in view.”

Mrs. Wardell and Harry had just finished their conversation, and she was leaving the pleasant sitting-room. “How bright you look!” giving Ruth's cheek a soft pat as she passed. Ruth looked around and saw no one but Harry, sitting by the window.

“Now's my time,” she thought; then a whisper in her ear: “Don't you do it; he's the one to apologize to you; he's been abusing you ever since you came to the house; you haven't done anything.” But she knew where the whisper came from, and closing her ears against it walked straight across the room and said, “Harry, I'm sorry I spoke to you as I did this morning; it was cruel in me. You must forgive me.”



Harry looked up in perfect amazement; it seemed to almost take away his power of speech. "I declare for it," he exclaimed at last, "you're a brick: I couldn't do such a plucky thing. I guess I'd better ask your pardon, after all the mean things I've said, over and over."

"They've not been exactly pleasant; but now let's be friends; 'let by-gones be by-gones.'"

"Very well; I'd like to. I'll promise not to bother you any more if you'll forget all the contemptible things I've said. As Aunt Amy says, I wouldn't 'dare nag a boy of my own size as I do you;' and no more I would, for he might whale me; she says I'm a 'coward' if I'm rude to a girl and a stranger."

"We ought to be friends, Harry: you've no mother and I've none."

A shadow crossed the boy's face, "That's so; let's make a compact to help each other. Only you mustn't be vexed if I laugh sometimes; I can't help that; but we'll be pals, and have lots of fun," holding out his hand.

Ruth was rather shocked at the "pals" but she shook the offered hand heartily, then went over to the piano to pick out the air she had been singing. That evening she told her aunt of the "compact." "That is my brave true girl come back; I'm very glad," said her aunt.



That was the beginning of a better state of feeling between the two; they grew to be good friends. Occasionally the old temptation would come back, Harry would begin to tease and Ruth to get angry, but if either one said the word "compact" it would end in a hearty laugh. Ruth found many opportunities for carrying out her purpose of being a help to Harry. His school-days had been few before coming to R——, and he was farther behind those of his own age even than Ruth herself. She could often give him some assistance, for which he was very grateful. In many studies she was brighter and quicker than he was, but in arithmetic he could often straighten out the tangles for her.

Ruth took hold of his bad grammar and his slang with a high hand. "I make lots of mistakes myself in grammar, but I won't talk slang, as you do. That must be a boy's accomplishment; he's welcome to it. I don't want it."

"Of course not, Miss Elegant! Miss Prim!"

"How nice you would look, Ruth Avery, if you were rigged out like other girls," he exclaimed one evening, when they were busy with their books. He spoke soberly, but there was a twinkle in his eye.

The color came quickly to Ruth's face, and the curly head gave its proud, angry toss; but



before she could reply Harry held up his hand. "Oh, I'm sorry I said that." Then, laughing, "We came mighty near an explosion that time; did n't we!"

"I did; I believe I'm silly," joining in the laugh.

"And I believe I'm rude," so the peace was made.

Mrs. Wardell saw with pleasure the kind comradeship springing up between the two. "You will find, my dear Ruth, that Harry has a gentle tender heart under all his fun and badinage. The poor boy has had so much that is sad in his life! But he has borne it all like a real hero. You have heard of Dr. Hale's 'Lend a Hand' Society; have you not? That is a good motto for you young people to commence with; a good motto for a lifetime. All around us are those who need a helping hand, and often when we least expect it a human soul is hungry for sympathy. You have begun to serve the dear Christ; his life was one of infinite helpfulness. He gave his life for others; what can I do for him in the person of his children? should be our constant question. If you start out in the morning with this thought in mind you will be astonished to find how many little things you can do for others in one day."

"But, Aunt Amy, I often have as much as



I can do to take care of this temper of mine without thinking of other people."

Mrs. Wardell smiled tenderly into the earnest young face. "You must leave yourself in better hands. In helping others you will be helped. I came across this sentence the other day: 'We must accept ourselves; we must bear with ourselves faithfully and lovingly.' You must learn this lesson, dear Ruth. I hope you can influence Harry to give his heart to Christ."

"Oh, Aunt Amy, I never could speak to him about that. I tried once, and he laughed, and asked, 'Do Christians get mad? Aunt Amy does n't, but some others do.'"

"Well, dear, it does not always need words to influence those around us. A gentle, loving, forgiving spirit, shown in all our daily life, is far more potent than the most eloquent words."

"Will I ever be all that?"

"I hope and expect that you will be, dear, through God's grace."



## CHAPTER XVIII.

THE holidays with all their delights had just come and gone. It was a bright Saturday afternoon. Ruth was singing in her room when Mrs. Wardell tapped at her door. "Busy, dear?"

"No, Aunt Amy; I've done my mending, my practising, and my studying, and now I've nothing else to do," turning a smiling face towards her aunt; "is there anything you'd like me to do?"

"Not for myself. What were you planning for this afternoon?"

"Why, I was going out with some of the school girls for a walk and a little sight-seeing; some lovely pictures they want me to see."

Mrs. Wardell hesitated. "The walk would do you good. I had thought of asking you to read to Harry for a while. You know he has been sick with grippe for several days; he cannot go out, and the doctor says he must not use his eyes. It is dull business for a boy. He was just asking me, 'Has Ruth forgotten a fellow entirely?'"

A little dark frown darkened Ruth's bright



face. "It seems to me he's always getting sick. I thought boys were stronger than girls, but I don't believe they are—or else they make more fuss."

"He had no sensible grandmother, Ruth, to look after his health, and sometimes he lacked wholesome food or he might be stronger," looking earnestly at the young girl, who was a rosy picture of youthful life and vigor. "You owe your grandmother a great debt, my child, for all her care of your bodily needs. But do as you choose about the reading; I know you would enjoy the walk."

Ruth caught the sober, tired expression of Mrs. Wardell's face; "Why, Aunt Amy, you are all worn out;" then putting her arms around her, "How naughty and selfish in me to hesitate a moment when there is anything I can do for you."

"Not for me exactly, Ruth."

"For Harry?" with a little of the old feeling of dislike for the boy.

"No, dear, for a better Friend than either of us."

"For Jesus, you mean; here is a good chance to lend a helping hand, I see, and I'll lend it," with her sweet smile. "Queer, I have not thought of Harry all these days. I can take my walk some day after school. What shall I



read him, Aunt Amy?" now all interest. "I wonder if he would like my favorite book, 'Artemas.'"

"You can try, and see. I am sure he will like almost anything you read and will appreciate your self-denial," giving her a kiss. "I will leave him in your hands, as I have to go with May and Bell to do some shopping."

"Hello, comrade!" for Ruth had vetoed being called "pal," "glad to see you," was her greeting as she entered Harry's room.

"Aunt Amy says you gave up a walk to come and read to me; now that's what I call genuine good in you."

"Why, how pale you look! I didn't know you had been sick."

"I guess if you'd been gripped and tortured as I've been for the last few days you'd look pale too. I tell you what, Ruth, it takes the vim out of a fellow; the pain's awful."

"How sorry I am," feeling reproached. "I wish I had come in before this time."

"Wish you had; but, I tell you, Aunt Amy doesn't forget me when I'm sick, or any other time; she's just an angel."

"That she is; on that point we are agreed."

"Yes, she's true blue. Is that a pious book you've brought?"

"Yes, but you'll like it, I know. I read it



first at home, sitting in my apple-tree, with the birds all around me in the branches."

"Tell me about it all; I never lived in the country."

Ruth grew enthusiastic as she described her home, the woods, the fields, and the pretty brook. She had an interested listener, and before she knew it she was deep in the story of that afternoon when she missed the picnic and her grandmother fell and broke her leg. Then she told of Dollie, of Peggy and Sam, and their comicalities, all in such a funny way that Harry laughed until he had to lie back in his easy chair, tired out.

"Now I must stop and go to reading, or you'll be worse instead of better."

"No, it wont hurt me one bit; it does me good. How I'd like to be in those woods and by that brook," with a dreamy look in his eyes. "That grandmother of yours made you stand around, I bet; but she was good to give you such a nice home. I tell you! if I'd had a good grandmother"—he choked a little and Ruth thought there were tears in his eyes, so she commenced her reading at once. Soon they were both interested in the story of those Jesus loved, and before she dreamed of their coming Ruth heard the cheerful voices of the returned shoppers; the short afternoon was gone.





WILLIAM HURD LAWRENCE '96.







"That's a nice book; when will you read me the rest?"

"Sometime to-morrow, Harry."

As she was leaving the room he called her back. "Ruth, I do believe you are a Christian; I'll take back some things I've said."

"I'm trying to be one, Harry, but sometimes I have a hard fight."

"And I've made it harder sometimes, while I myself have not even tried; but I believe I will."

"Had a long afternoon, dear?" asked Mrs. Wardell.

"Why, no, Aunt Avery. It's been very short; we've had the nicest kind of a time: just lovely! Harry liked the book. I'm ever so glad I stayed at home with him," and Ruth tripped upstairs with a light heart, meeting May and Belle on the way.

"Here comes our sunshine," said Belle giving her a box of bonbons and a loving squeeze.

When in her own room Ruth kneeled down by her little white bed and offered an earnest prayer for Harry. And she did not forget to thank her Heavenly Father for all his goodness—something she seldom forgot in these glad days—but for the first time in her life she remembered to thank him for giving her such a good friend as her grandmother had been.



Her heart had warmed towards her many times during this absence, but never until that day had she realized how much she owed the one who had taken her in--a wilful, troublesome child; giving her a good home and watchful care.

"I must have bothered her to death," she thought, "the poor old lady! And I was so glad to leave her, and hardly give her a thought here in this beautiful home. Perhaps she loved me all the time better than I imagined. Annie Stedman thinks grandma is really homesick for me. I wish I had been patient with her those last weeks, when she scolded so and was so provoking. She says I forget all about her, now that I'm away; I fear I do the most of the time. I must write her a good long letter."

The bell interrupted her musings. With a song on her lip and in her heart she went down to meet the happy group that always gathered at the evening meal. To her surprise she found Harry at the table.

"His new nurse took such good care of him that he thought he could join us," laughed Mrs. Wardell, giving Ruth an approving glance.



## CHAPTER XIX.

THE happy days "just flew," for Ruth Avery: so much to do—work that she liked—so much to be enjoyed, and darling Aunt Amy so near all the time to help and to guide. "Was ever a girl so blessed?" she often asked herself.

Her aunt rejoiced to see a constant improvement in Ruth, not only in her studies and in her manners but especially in her disposition—a gentleness and sweetness of temper that were often surprising even to Mrs. Wardell, who was ever looking for and expecting good in every one. Mr. Wardell often said, "My wife knows how to draw out the best that is in people; she believes that there is some good in every human being, and she has the blessed faculty of finding the gold even when it is hidden in a mass of dross."

To Ruth herself it seemed that the battle was nearly gained; that she should never go back to the old ways of anger and impatience. To be sure, she had to admit that since she had made her peace with Harry there was nothing to test her strength in this her "paradise." Sometimes there was a little sparring between



the two, but generally the sharp-shooting ended in a hearty laugh.

Mrs. Wardell was glad to see that the bright young girl was gaining a strong, refining influence over the noisy rough boy, who had never been blessed with a sister. "Boys do need a power of polishing up; do n't they!" said Ruth merrily. "At least some boys do; now Clarence Stedman is a little gentleman."

"Yes, he is," replied Mrs. Wardell; "but think of his mother and sisters. How could he be other than gentlemanly? But I do not think that he will make as smart a man as Harry will, for he has not as much pluck and push. Harry's hard life has made him very self-reliant; then he has some noble qualities."

"If there are any you'll discover them, Aunt Amy, and dig them out," was Ruth's gay retort.

Ruth had been promoted to a higher grade, and was now among scholars of her own age. She found her work and her companions more congenial. She soon formed some strong friendships among the girls. "I like them," she said, to her aunt, "all but Grace King; I cannot like her, although she is pretty, bright, and dresses handsome—handsomely. But she is so 'airy!' I don't believe she or her mother is a real lady—like you, Aunt Amy."



"You are very keen in your conclusions," quite amused, for Mrs. Wardell knew that the Kings might be called "shoddy aristocracy." "You must not dislike her, Ruth; try to find some good qualities in her; if you do I am sure you will succeed."

"Perhaps—but she is hateful and sarcastic; some of the girls think she is just right because she is rich, I suppose; but a good many don't like her any better than I do."

It was not many days after this conversation that Ruth came home from school with a very sober face. Finding her aunt in her cosey little sewing-room she seated herself beside her on a low hassock. Mrs. Wardell noticed the forlorn expression at once.

"What has happened, dear?" gently stroking the curly head.

"Oh, Aunt Amy, that dreadful Grace King has been saying such tantalizing things to me. She ridiculed my dress; said, 'Miss Ruth has a great passion for the antique, especially in sleeves.' Then the girls roared," bursting into tears and hiding her face in her aunt's lap.

"But, my dear, why should you mind such foolish speeches?"

"Aunt Amy, that is nothing to some other things she said about my being a poor pauper girl living on the bounty of my rich relations.



And it's all because I was marked higher than she was in language and drawing," bursting out afresh.

"Did you get angry with her?" asked Mrs. Wardell very soberly.

Ruth's head came up in an instant.

"Angry? Why, that's no name for it. I got furious, roaring, tearing mad, and I gave her one piece of my mind. She just looked frightened, and so did the other girls; I don't think she will attack me again very soon."

"Oh, my dear, dear child, I am very sorry," and there were tears in the kind voice and eyes.

"So am I, and my dear teacher heard me too, and looked so shocked! Oh dear, why did she provoke me so!"

"Better ask, Ruth, 'Why did I *let* her provoke me so?' very solemnly. "Did you forget your Saviour and not raise a prayer to him?"

"I forgot everything, *everything*. Oh, Aunt Amy, I can never hope I am a Christian again. Why did I get so angry? Why did I mind her foolish words? I really don't care what she thinks. I am completely discouraged."

"And so am I," thought poor Mrs. Wardell; but she only said gently, "Let us tell Jesus all about it." Dropping on her knees she poured forth such a tender, beseeching prayer that it lingered in Ruth's memory as long as life



lasted. Then she took the sobbing girl on her lap and talked to her long and earnestly, until Ruth made a solemn promise, "God helping me, I will never allow my temper to master me!"

When they both grew more quiet and cheerful Mrs. Wardell said, "Ruth, I think you must apologize to Grace."

"Oh, auntie, how can I?"

"Did you not call her unkind names?"

"Yes, the very worst sort," hiding her face on her aunt's shoulder.

"So I feared. Go to her and tell her you are sorry; that is all you can do to make it right. You are not responsible for what she said, but you are responsible for your own angry, bitter words."

"I will do it, Aunt Amy; I will, to-morrow. Do you think I can ever be happy again?"

"Indeed you can. Now go to your room and again seek God's forgiveness, for the sin is against him. He will pardon and give you new strength and grace to conquer," said Mrs. Wardell with a heart full of tender pity for the stormy-spirited girl who made herself so much trouble and sorrow.

Mrs. Wardell sat by Ruth's bed a long time that evening; she found her very quiet and hopeful.

"God has forgiven me, Aunt Amy, for Jesus'



sake. How patient and loving Christ is with me ; so good ! But I don't think it will ever happen again," and it never did in all her future life.

Before Mrs. Wardell left the room she said, " Now, Ruth, I am going to have your dresses remodelled and get you a couple of new ones."

" Oh, do n't ; that will cost too much."

" My dear child, we are able to do it ; it is a pleasure. I expected to help mother in your outfit, but she would not consent. You have been exposed to many unnecessary annoyances that I could easily have prevented. But you were such an independent little puss, and so opposed to having any changes made, that I thought I would leave you to work out the problem for yourself. Your grandmother would be sorry if she knew just how it is ; she has lived so long in that little country place, and out of the village, that she cannot imagine how different things are here in the city. I will write her to-morrow, so that you need not feel that you are disobeying her orders."

Ruth caught her aunt's hand and kissed it. " How kind you are. It has been hard to wear these dresses, so different from the other girls'. It will be nice to have something pretty and fresh ; I've felt so for ever so long."

" And you have been too proud to tell your



aunt! I have been waiting for a word from you; now we will have a dressmaker at once."

Ruth laughed gayly. "I do love pretty things, but grandma thinks it's so foolish and vain to 'rig one's self up,' and says 'girls ought to dress plainly.' Then she did n't want me to be willing to take all you would give, like any beggar-girl. She does n't want me spoiled."

"No danger, dear, of your losing your pride and independence. Mother is mistaken. Beautiful things, pretty things, and in good taste, either in dress or furnishings, need not spoil us; they help to cultivate, refine and elevate us. The beautiful has its mission in these things as well as in nature. Think how exquisitely lovely God's works are. The girl who is taught not to love dainty clothing, as pretty and nice as her circumstances justify, I fear will lack refinement. But, of course, we are not to set our hearts upon these things, nor let them come between our souls and God."



## CHAPTER XX.

A CONFUSED and shame-faced girl met Miss Edwards, the teacher, at school the next morning, but she spoke up bravely: "Miss Edwards, I am very sorry indeed that I was so angry yesterday."

"I was astonished, I must say, Ruth. I did not hear what Grace said to provoke you, but the girls told me that she was very rude and provoking. I shall have a serious talk with her."

"But that was no excuse for me, Miss Edwards. I am going to ask her pardon for the unkind words I spoke."

Miss Edwards looked troubled. "I hardly think I would, Ruth; Grace can be very irritating and may say some unpleasant things."

"Do not fear another explosion," laughed Ruth. Then soberly, "I must do it, whether she accepts my apology or not."

"You are a brave girl; I hope that you will not meet with a rebuff."

It was the hardest thing that Ruth Avery had ever attempted to do in all her short life, but in thinking it over quietly in her own room



the evening before she had decided that Aunt Amy was right; that it must be done. She found Grace surrounded by some of the very girls who had heard the quarrel, and said very earnestly, "Grace, I want to ask your pardon for being so angry yesterday and for speaking as I did; I said things that were neither kind nor ladylike; I am very sorry."

"Oh, you need not ask my pardon. I did not pay any attention to such kind of language as that. I suppose it is country manners," very sarcastically.

Ruth felt the hot blood rushing to her face; a sharp retort was on her tongue, but she checked herself in time, lifting a little prayer. One of the girls exclaimed, "For shame, Grace, when Ruth made such a sweet apology! You know you were rude to her. I call that contemptible."

"Well, I'm very sorry for my rudeness," said Ruth; "that's all I can say. I wish we might be friends," holding out a hand that Grace disdained to notice. As Ruth walked away quietly she felt very thankful that she had been kept from speaking more bitter words.

A report of the interview soon reached Miss Edwards' ears. Miss Grace was summoned to the desk and received a rebuke that sent her back to her seat a very crestfallen girl.



"And now you must win her, Ruth," said Mrs. Wardell, as Ruth told her story, sitting by the open fire that evening with a pet kitten in her lap. The kitten and canary were her delight, for pets had never been allowed in Grandma Avery's neat house.

Ruth watched for an opportunity to do Grace a kindness, and one soon offered. A subject was given out one afternoon for a short essay to be written within an hour. Mrs. Wardell had provided Ruth with some helps that the others did not have; among them a condensed book of reference that was in great demand with the scholars. Ruth hastily gleaned what she could on the subject from this book, and then quietly passed it on to Grace's desk. Grace was a real student and very ambitious to do her best; she gave Ruth an astonished and grateful look that made her very happy.

As the days passed, watchful Ruth found many little unobtrusive ways of doing kindnesses; sometimes they were scornfully ignored and her advances repelled, but she was kept from angry words, although she could not always prevent the flash of her eyes.

In the course of a few weeks Ruth announced to her aunt, "Grace and I are very good friends, and, Aunt Amy, I have made a discovery."

"Well, what is it, Ruth?"



"I have discovered some hid treasure in Grace King's heart."

"Oh, you have, have you? I am not at all surprised."

"She is generous to a fault; I believe she'd give away anything she has. She's not half so haughty as she sometimes seems. The girls say her mother's a very proud, vain woman; she may not teach Grace to love and serve Jesus, as you teach me. What would I be if you had not taken me in hand?"

"God is leading and teaching you, Ruth."

"Yes, I know; but it's through you, dear Aunt Amy. How I did need you to love me, and mother me, and cure me."

One evening, when Belle and May were busy with their books, Ruth walked into the room wearing for the first time one of her pretty, becoming new dresses, feeling a little shy and uncomfortable in her strange attire. Belle threw up her hands in amazement. "What a transformation! Can this be our little country lass?" Then the two girls caught her between them and danced her up and down the room, laughing, calling her Miss Avery, and having a real frolic over her, while Harry looked on in undisguised admiration.

"Oh, girls, you'll make her as vain as a peacock!" he exclaimed.



"No danger of that," answered May.

"More danger of her being ready to fight like a cock," laughed Ruth, doubling up her fist at him and joining in the general merriment.

"I know you are game every time, but your feathers don't ruffle up as easy as they used to; suppose it'll be harder than ever to provoke a fight now the little sleeves are gone; I'm real sorry!" with a roguish laugh.

"Oh, I don't care for the old-fashioned dresses; I can wear them sometimes," with an independent toss of her head.

"No, no; you never shall put them on again; we will give them to the poor," said Belle.

"Grandma would not like that; I'd rather keep them just as they are; she would not know me in this rig."

"Why, my little lady, it seems to me you are looking unusually well this evening, for some reason," remarked Mr. Wardell on his arrival—which caused a general laugh, for he was noted for his want of observation in matters of dress.

Ruth colored and looked piqued; she did not quite enjoy this general admiration of her new plumage. Mrs. Wardell noticed her annoyance and quickly turned the attention from the conscious little maiden.



That evening she gave her daughters some advice. "Do not speak again to Ruth about her dress; she does not like it, and she may begin to think it of more importance than it is."

"But, mamma," exclaimed Belle, "did you ever see a greater change for the better? Even Mary gave her many admiring glances as she waited upon her so deferentially at table. What a pity she has gone all these weeks looking so like a prim little old lady."

"Yes, it is. Not many girls would do as she has done; she has a world of independence that will make her a strong woman."

"And a world of persistency too," interrupted May. "She is the most persistent little mortal about her practising; sometimes it is troublesome, when she persists in playing a passage her own way. I find I can coax her into almost anything; but I do not think that I could drive her an inch."

"A firm but gentle hand is ever the best; I found that out years ago with a little girl of my own," with a smiling glance at May.



## CHAPTER XXI.

THE winter was gone and windy March had come ; "fairly skipped away," as Ruth expressed it. "And before I know it this happy year will be over and I must go—this happiest year of my life." She had come in from school all bright and rosy, and, as usual, had sought her aunt to give a record of the day's doings. "I don't think I was ever so happy before, unless it was before mamma died, and that seems so long ago I can't remember."

"Why, Ruth, you always appeared gay and joyous ; you are one of the cheerful kind ; such a disposition is a real blessing."

"Yes, I was then, at home, most of the time. The birds and the flowers and the little brook were all my friends, and I used to tell them all kinds of stories—all my secrets. But oh, Aunt Amy, I used to get so lonely and homesick for mamma ; I often cried myself to sleep. I never do that here." A shadow clouded the sunny face at the remembrance. "I was so disappointed after grandma got well. I thought she was going to love me and pet me as you do. The



last few months I was wicked ; I did n't care much what I did ; it did n't seem to make any difference. Grandma would scold, and find fault, no matter what I did ; so I did n't try to please her very much, I guess."

" I think," suggested Mrs. Wardell.

" Oh, yes, that is better. Miss Edwards says ' I guess ' is not elegant. I thought nobody loved me, not even God," impetuously, " and that's the way I got so far from him."

" Yes, dear, there was your great mistake. Never doubt his love under any circumstances ; remember you are a daughter of the Heavenly King—a daughter beloved, dear to him as the apple of his eye. Your grandmother and I are quite unlike. She has peculiar notions : she thinks it foolish to pet a child ; she never petted her own boy. But she does love you more than you think. Let me read you something," drawing from her pocket a letter just received from Mrs. Avery.

" ' Ruth is a dear, good girl. I did not realize how much I loved her and depended upon her until she was gone. I am glad to hear such good reports of her. I can see that you are right about her wardrobe. I am an old foggy, out of the gay world, and I did not know. Am glad you made the needed changes, and sorry she had any annoyance. I will make it all right



with you some day. I am very grateful for all you are doing for the dear child.' "

Ruth's eyes were big with amazement. "Aunt Amy, is grandmother sick? She never talks like that when she is well."

Mrs. Wardell could not restrain a smile. "I hope not, Ruth; she does not speak of being ill."

"I don't believe she's very well; she's gentle when she's sick—or she was, that only time. But then you were there; perhaps that was the reason," and Ruth chuckled merrily.

"My dear Ruth," very tenderly, "I fear you do not appreciate all your grandmother has done for you."

"Indeed I do, only I wish she had done it all in a different way. Poor dear old grandma! You don't know how provoking she can be sometimes."

"Yes, I do, for I lived with her a short time when a girl a little older than you. I know all about it; I know it has been hard and that you have had very many struggles. Jesus knows it too, and he is pitiful and merciful. But with it all your grandmother is a kind, noble woman. She has tried to bring you up in the best way, at least in the way she thought best. She was very kind to me, and taught me some wholesome lessons that I never forgot. Poor woman!



She has had great sorrows, and I think that they have made her hard."

"Why, Aunt Amy, how good it is to think that you have had my trials!" Ruth exclaimed excitedly. "I had forgotten that you ever lived with grandma, if she ever told me; but how beautifully you must have borne it all. I can imagine how good and patient you were; not the careless, helter-skelter girl I am."

Mrs. Wardell laughed heartily. "Do you think that I was always the Aunt Amy of to-day? I was a wayward, thoughtless girl. I made your grandmother a great deal of trouble, I fear, the little time I stayed under her roof."

"Oh, good, good!" interrupted Ruth, clapping her hands; "I'm so glad to hear that you were once a wayward, thoughtless girl. Can I ever be such a woman as my dear Aunt Amy?" seizing her aunt's hand and kissing it over and over. "Perhaps there is some hope for me. But, then, you did not have my fiery temper."

"Perhaps not. But, Ruth, you need not wish to be your Aunt Amy; you must be yourself; your own true self."

"But, Aunt Amy, I do wish I could always live with you, for you cherish the good spirits and drive out the evil ones. I'm like Ruth in the Bible: where thou goest I should like to go, and where thou lodgest I should like to lodge."



"And will you add, 'Thy God shall be my God'?" very earnestly.

"Yes, Aunt Amy," said Ruth, the tears coming to her eyes. "I want your God for my God; I hope he is."

"I am sure he is, dear, and will ever be, whether you live with me or elsewhere. He will do the very best for his dear child, and order all things for her highest good."

"When is this confab going to end?" Ruth looking up caught a glimpse of Harry's laughing eyes peering from between the folds of the portiere. "Are there any secrets on the carpet?"

"No, Harry," said Mrs. Wardell; "no secrets, and our confab is ended."

"Well, Lady Ruth, if you're at liberty, will you just come and help a fellow out of a scrape? Here's a sentence that I cannot diagram, for the life of me."

"At your service, Sir Harry," with a mock bow.

"Why, I thought you'd never get through," said Harry when they were alone. "I've been waiting for you for the last half-hour. Been having a solemn time, I should think; but once I heard you clap your hands and give a shout."

"Harry Wardell, were you listening?"

"Listening!" indignantly. "What do you



take me for, Ruth Avery? I'm not in that line of business." Then with a mischievous glance, "Been having another fracas in school, and 'fessing to Aunt Amy, that you're so afraid I'd hear?"

Ruth crimsoned up to her hair, but she answered soberly, "No, Harry, I have not, and I hope never to have another; God helping me, I never will."

Harry grew sober too. "Say, comrade, I begin to believe in your religion. I've been watching you; wish I had some of the same sort. It's true blue."

Ruth made no reply, but a little thanksgiving went up from her heart that something in her life had been "a word for Jesus." It was hard to speak to the fun-loving Harry of anything serious, but she remembered Mrs. Wardell's remark: "An acted word is often more potent for good than a spoken one."

Soon they were all engrossed with their lessons; Mrs. Wardell, passing through the room, smiled to herself to think what kind, pleasant friends the two had become.



## CHAPTER XXII.

MRS. WARDELL sat in her cosey sewing-room with an open letter in her hand, looking perplexed and troubled, but she brightened when she heard Ruth's cheery voice singing gayly as she skipped up to her room. They were to take a long trolley-ride—Ruth's great delight—that Friday afternoon, to East Avenue, that delightful part of the city, where Mrs. Wardell had a call to make, and then were to visit a conservatory where there was a fine display of orchids. It was a lovely May day, and Ruth had hurried home in high glee to be in time for the little excursion with "dear Aunt Amy."

Soon she appeared in her aunt's room wearing her dainty new spring hat, looking the very picture of charming young girlhood, Mrs. Wardell thought. "I was afraid I was late, but I see I am not."

"No, in good time. How do you like your new hat?"

"I like it ever so much; it is ever so pretty. I was thinking, Aunt Amy, as I put it on, that just as soon as I get to teaching I'm going to pay you for all these nice things."



"Perhaps you can, Ruth, but do not think so much about that part; there is a grace of receiving as well as of giving, which first grace you need to cultivate," gazing fondly into the fair young face. "It is often harder to receive gracefully than to give gracefully. You must not forget, dear, that in doing for you I am only helping my mother; do not feel burdened, but just be thankful and glad."

Harry's prophecy had not come true: "All these fine clothes'll spoil Ruth; she'll get vain, just like all the rest of the girls; they are such a silly lot! Sometimes I watch them as they go prinking along the streets thinking some one's admiring their handsome feathers, and I just laugh to myself and think, 'What little geese you are!'"

These compliments to the sex he had privately delivered to Aunt Amy.

But Ruth Avery had too many other things in her noddle to give very much thought to dresses and hats. She liked her new things, put them on, and then forgot all about them. "The only time I'm conscious that my dresses are different," she informed her aunt, "is when Grace King looks at me with her sharp eyes. Once I was sure she was going to make one of her mean speeches—I saw it in her glance and in her curling lip; but she seemed to think



better of it, and only said, 'That's a pretty dress you have on, Ruth.' "

Mrs. Wardell sat quietly gazing out of the window with a troubled face, making no preparation for their walk. At length Ruth asked in rather an impatient tone, "Why, Aunt Amy, it is getting late; are you not going out this afternoon?"

"Yes, dear, in a moment; but I have just received a letter from your grandmother that has quite unnerved me. I fear that she is ill. Read it yourself and see what you think," handing Ruth the letter.

It was very short, and written in a trembling, scrawling hand, very different from her usual firm one. The burden of it was, "I think Ruth must come home, just as soon as school closes, and spend the vacation with me. I want to see her very much, and I need her."

Mrs. Wardell watched the sudden change in Ruth's face as she read; it was like the dropping of a dark cloud over a bright sunny day. "Yes, Aunt Amy, she must be sick," with a long-drawn sigh; "she expected me to stay a year."

"I thought at first that I would not show you the letter until to-morrow; but then to-morrow is our picnic to the lake, and I feared it might spoil the day, and so concluded to tell



you at once. Perhaps she is not really ill, only a little blue."

"She never gets blue; I think she is sick; and now I remember, Annie Stedman said in her last letter that grandma had not been in church for several Sundays, and that the last time she came Mrs. Stedman thought she looked feeble."

"You did not tell me, Ruth."

"No, I forgot it; you know she hardly ever used to go to church, so I did n't wonder at that. I was so full of my own matters that I did n't pay much attention. Poor, lonely grandma!" with a tremble in her voice; "but how can I go away from this happy place!"

"Do not think about it now; we will go out and have a pleasant time. Grandmother may be better in a few days, or, if you have to go, it may be only for a short time. Either way, you must be a brave, strong little woman. And if she should prove to be very sick I will go home with you."

"Oh, Aunt Amy, will you?" and Ruth's face brightened at once. With the blessed faculty of youth for casting off cares and anxieties she soon forgot her troubles and enjoyed the afternoon to the utmost. The orchids especially delighted her with their strange, fantastic shapes and exquisite beauty. "There was one there



that looked like a lovely butterfly; it was so beautiful!" she told Harry.

"Any that looked like toads?"

"No, you bad boy. Toads and orchids! The idea!"

Mrs. Wardell's heart was full of tenderness all that afternoon for the bright child that made the house so cheery and was growing so dear to them all. She did all she could to add to the pleasure of the trip. But Ruth hardly needed her help, for she was wild over the lovely streets with their fine trees in their delicate May foliage, the elegant dwellings, spring flowers, and bright green lawns. But Mrs. Wardell's thoughts were busy planning; she felt sure that Ruth's respite was at an end, for, if the grandmother wanted and needed her grandchild, there was her place; and the old lady might have a long, helpless illness.

She thought regretfully of the vacation's trips she had planned for Ruth: little excursions to Niagara, Watkins' Glen, and Chautauqua, which the family were intending to take; it had been decided that Ruth, and probably Harry, must be members of the party. Fortunately nothing had been said to her, so she need not know how much she was losing.

That evening Mrs. Wardell wrote a note of inquiry to Mrs. Avery's kind neighbor Mrs.



Hart, going into Ruth's room before retiring to tell her what she had done and bidding her not to think anything more about it until they heard something more definite. Ruth was already in bed, but not asleep. When Mrs. Wardell kissed her good-night she found the rosy cheeks wet with tears.

"I know I'll have to go, Aunt Amy; I know I ought to go; I was just praying Jesus to make me willing to go. I think poor grandma is very sick or she would not write so. She's wonderfully plucky; never tells of her pains and aches."

"I know; but we will hope for the best. It may be nothing serious. We will trust it in God's hands and go to sleep."

There were no traces of tears on Ruth's face the next morning when she came down to breakfast; even Mrs. Wardell did not imagine how hard had been the struggle of the previous evening, but Jesus knew.

The day proved to be delightfully warm and bright. The whole family joined in the picnic to the lake, including a couple of the friends of May and Belle. The long trolley ride from the city to Charlotte was a treat to Ruth. "It's great fun to go spinning along at such a rate!" she exclaimed to Harry.

"Yes; and then to think there's a jolly good



dinner spinning along with us. I helped to pack it, so I know the jolting wont do it any harm. There are lots of goodies," smacking his lips.

"Oh, you boys! always thinking of your stomachs!" with a disgusted look that set Harry off in a roar.

The air was delicious, fragrant with the blossoms of the last of May; the country so fresh and beautiful that Ruth was in ecstasy. She looked so smiling and happy that it almost brought the tears to Mrs. Wardell's eyes as she thought of all that might be hanging over the dear child.

It was too early in the season for the rush of pleasure-seekers, most of the houses were not yet opened, but the lake was there in all its glory and beauty; that more than satisfied Ruth. She had never seen the ocean, nor any large body of water, and her delight was unbounded. To Mrs. Wardell the lake seemed only quiet and restful that day, but to Ruth it was sparkling with enchanting life. She skipped along the beach and out on the long pier, never tiring of watching the immense blue sheet of water with its distant sails.

Altogether the day was one of inexpressible joy. "I never in my life spent such a charming day," she confided to Harry.



“And you enjoyed the good dinner too, I noticed,” he suggested slyly. “It seems girls can’t live on air and scenery any more than boys, when they go on picnics.”

“Of course not; but they don’t talk of something to eat all the time,” retorted Ruth merrily.



## CHAPTER XXIII.

THE early part of the following week Mrs. Wardell received a reply from Mrs. Hart that confirmed her fears. Mrs. Avery was feeble; spent part of each day in bed. At Mrs. Hart's urgent advice the doctor had been consulted, and he had pronounced the difficulty a serious one, which might end fatally. "She pines for Ruth," wrote Mrs. Hart. "I think if she were to return Mrs. Avery might gain heart and strength at once. Ruth had better come as soon as school closes. The girl who is with Mrs. Avery is very good as far as she knows, but she is a constant source of worry and annoyance. Tell Ruth that her grandmother talks of her daily."

When Mrs. Wardell read the letter to Ruth she exclaimed, "Aunt Amy, I must go at once; I must not wait for school to close. If anything should happen to grandmother I should never forgive myself for not going to her when she needed me so much."

"I think you are right, Ruth; the sooner you can go the better. But you need not start to-day," noticing the eager look; perhaps by the last of the week."

"I wont write to grandma that I'm coming,



I'll take her by surprise. I can send a note to Sam to meet me at the train," very cheerfully.

"I'm very glad you feel as you do, Ruth. If mother does not improve soon I will come to you just as soon as the girls are out of school and I can leave. I wish I could go with you, but it hardly seems possible just at present."

"Oh, Aunt Amy, I did not think: I shall miss seeing Cousin May graduate. That is too bad! She will look so lovely in her graduation dress." Then losing her self-control, "Aunt Amy, Aunt Amy, how can I leave you all! I've had such a happy time here, and you've all been so good to me; how can I go!" and she clung to her aunt, sobbing and crying.

"We all love you dearly, Ruth, and hate to have you leave us, but it will be pleasant at home. Think of your birds, and of the woods with all their sweet spring flowers. Think how glad your grandmother will be to have you back, and Annie Stedman, and many others. Then soon I may be coming and we will have more of our charming rambles." So she talked on quietly and cheerfully until Ruth grew calm.

"And, Ruth dear, remember it is God's voice that calls you away; it is the duty-path that he in his love marks out for your feet; walk in it bravely and gladly. You will find in the end that it is a pleasant path."



"But, Aunt Amy, how I shall need you! I fear I will go back to my old hasty, angry ways."

"You must not, dear. Jesus will go with you. He will not be left behind—he your best and strongest Friend and Helper. You may have been depending on me and my poor help too much, darling. You know how the mother-bird drives its young from the nest, that they may try their own wings. This is what God is doing with you; but do not be afraid, for underneath are the everlasting arms; if there is danger of your falling, they will hold you safely. If you take up this duty patiently, yes joyfully, think how pleased your Saviour will be." These strong and helpful words lingered long in Ruth's memory.

The good-byes to school and schoolmates were all said, the trunk was packed, and tomorrow Ruth was to start for home. Mr. Wardell had secured good company for her all the way. That last evening in her beloved "paradise" was a very bright and cheery one; she enjoyed every moment of it, even to Harry's comical words of farewell.

"I don't see any sense in your going. Gee whiz! I wouldn't go if I were in your place."

"Why, Harry, I thought you were never going to use that slang expression again."



"I didn't mean to; I know it's not very 'elegant,' as you say, but how can a fellar express his feelings when he's dumbfounded? Who do suppose is going to improve me and my manners—to say nothing of my stupidity? But really and truly, Ruth, I'm awfully sorry to have you go."

"But I'm going, all the same."

"Yes, I suppose so; you'd go through fire and water, I do believe. You are good stuff; a regular soldier."

"A soldier of the Cross, I hope, Harry," said Ruth very earnestly.

"You'll have crosses enough, no doubt; a wrestle with pots and kettles, and that grandmother of yours'll tear the heart out of you."

"You bad boy! How dreadful!"

"Perhaps it is," laughing. Then soberly, "If I could be around I'd carry one end of that cross for you, but as I can't I'll write you the jolliest kind of letters."

"All right! Don't forget; they'll be ever so welcome."

There was singing, playing, and merry chat and frolic, ending with a hymn, and a prayer that was like a benediction to Ruth. Sweetly and earnestly Mr. Wardell remembered the dear one who should journey from them on the morrow, bespeaking God's care over her on the



way and his blessing through life, and thanking him for all the brightness that she had brought to their home.

Then Mrs. Wardell marched her off to bed, with the command, "Do not think of a single thing, but go right to sleep," a command literally obeyed by Ruth, as she was tired out after all the excitement of the day.

The next morning Ruth Avery left the blessed home where she had been so happy and had learned so many sweet lessons. She was bright and cheerful at the partings, but it was a wistful, pitiful face that looked out at Mrs. Wardell from the car window. "Poor, brave little Ruth!" thought her aunt, with a heart full of a yearning tenderness that she had not dared to express. On a card in the basket of delicious lunch that Aunt Amy handed her were these pencilled words: "Watch and pray, dear Ruth; watch and pray; and may you live daily in the sunlight of God's love!"

Her companion on the journey—an elderly man—proved to be very kind and very entertaining. The people in the car, the pleasant country, towns and villages through which the Empire State express whirled them at such lightning speed, all diverted her, so that the day seemed short. The latter part of the afternoon the long journey was ended, and she found her-



self on the platform of the home dépôt. The first sight that caught her eye was Sam—the veritable Sam—with Dollie.

“Wall, wall, Ruth, glad to see ye back ; why, you ’re as pretty as a pink, an’ nat’ral as life,” was his greeting. “Look out there, Dollie’s up to her old tricks,” as Ruth attempted to pet the dear old horse. “Your gran’ma don’t know anything about it, nor nobody ; wont she be astonished !”

“How is grandmother, Sam ?”

“She’s awful poorly ; putters ’round mornings, but goes to bed afternoons. I left her in bed. But she ’ll chirp up, now you’ve come. That girl she’s got’s no account. ‘She’s no Ruth,’ your gran’ma often says, and I says, ‘No ; Ruth’s smart as a whip, chip of the old block.’ Then the old lady always laughs. But you’re awful citified, ’pears to me ; better not wear them duds in your gran’ma’s room, or she ’ll have a fit.”

Ruth was glad of Sam’s suggestion, for she had forgotten the new hat and jacket ; she was thankful that under the sack was one of her old plain dresses. “How beautiful this country is ! So sweet and fresh with all these green growing things ; not much like the city.”

“No ; course not ; no dirty brick and mortar here ! All’s spick-span clean.”



"But, Sam, it is lovely there too," thinking of the beautiful streets and of the lake, "and they are all so good and kind. Oh dear! oh dear!" and Ruth bravely choked back a sob.

"You poor little lambkin, I just know all about it; but somebody'll be glad to see you here, you bet. And you just do what you can for the old lady, for I don't believe she'll stay long."

"Oh, Sam, is she so very sick?"

"Why, not so very, but she's poorly, poorly; snap all gone out of her; bad sign in one like her."

As they neared the house, "Now you get out, and run up stairs and snatch off them duds before you go in her room. If that fool of a girl don't see us, and scream out, 'There's company comin',' 't will be all right. There she is now, the goosie; I'll keep her here," waving his hand to her, "and you scud in the house."



## CHAPTER XXIV.

WHEN Ruth slipped quietly into her grandmother's room she found her asleep. The face on the pillow was so pallid and worn, so changed, and the hands—those busy hands—folded on the blue, old-fashioned coverlid were so thin and bony—the little plain gold ring on one finger now too large—that Ruth could hardly keep back the tears that welled up into her eyes. She sat on the edge of the bed and watched her for a few moments, until the black eyes opened. "My dear sick grandma, I've come back to you."

The old lady stretched out her arms and drew Ruth to her, almost smothering her with kisses. "Oh, my dear child, how good of you to come! I am so glad to see you; and you left them all, and school not closed, just to come to me. I have longed for you, and prayed for you, and now *you have come*," and she dropped back on the pillow with a look of supreme content.

All Ruth's doubts of her grandmother's love vanished at that moment never to return. When she realized what her coming meant to the lonely woman, the sacrifice of leaving her dear



friends seemed as nothing. She only regretted that she had not come weeks earlier.

"Why, how you have grown, and how well you look," pinching the carnation cheeks lovingly; "my own dear little girl though, still, come back to your old grandmother unspoiled."

Ruth, who knew so well what it is have a heart hungry for affection, now realized for the first time that poor lonely Grandma Avery too longed for and needed human love and care. "Poor grandma! I've never loved her as I should, God forgive me! But now I'll make amends."

There were questions to be asked and answered, and many things to be told. Ruth sat a long time holding her grandmother's hand, giving accounts of school, etc., but being careful not to say much that would suggest to Mrs. Avery the great contrast in the manner of living between the two households.

"Dear child," asked Grandma Avery at last, looking earnestly at Ruth with her piercing black eyes, that yet were tender and loving, "have you gained the mastery over that temper of yours? You are greatly improved, I see, in many ways; have you gained anything in this respect?"

"I hope—I think—I have," dropping her eyes in confusion.



"I am very thankful, Ruth, if you have. There is where I made a great mistake, that I did not correct you when a little girl and show you the sin and evil of yielding to an angry spirit; I was proud of your 'Avery spunk,' and did not think where it might lead."

Mrs. Avery's face grew bright and cheerful during this long conversation, but when she attempted to rise Ruth saw how great was the change in her, how feeble she had grown.

"Now you lie still, grandma dear, and let me get you a nice tea, as I used to when you were lame."

"But I must get up and attend to things; that shiftless girl—I have to watch her all the time."

"I am here to do that now," gently pushing her back on the bed, "and you can lie quiet."

"It does seem good to think there is some one to look after matters. How could a girl grow up as untidy and disorderly as that one is! I am thankful I did not bring you up that way."

The house showed to Ruth's keen eyes that Mrs. Avery's estimate of the girl was correct.

"I want to get her out of the house, Ruth, as soon as possible; she can go to-night."

"Not to-night, grandma; it is too far to her home. Sam can take her in the morning."



"Well, in the morning then; you can have Peggy all you want; she has been very good and kind to me."

It was a great change to our little maiden to sit down to supper with Sam -- in his shirt sleeves and smelling of the stable--and Laura, the young girl, in her untidy gown. Ruth had little appetite for the plain fare of Laura's poor cooking. The picture of the dainty table she had just left and of the loved faces that were just about that time gathering in the pleasant dining-room was too vivid. She choked down half a slice of the half-baked bread, drank a glass of milk, then excusing herself went out into the yard and climbed up into her old seat in the apple-tree. There, it is to be feared, she had a good cry; but if she did the robins were too sleepy to tell; and it must have been a short one, for when Sam came out of the house she was just descending from her perch. With a smiling face she asked,

"Sam, how is Aunt Peggy?"

"Oh, she's the same old way; kind of a good critter."

"Does she steal in these days?" asked Ruth tentatively.

"No, I guess not; I hain't heard anything about it lately; guess she's made up her mind honesty's the best policy; that's my doctrine.



She'll be all-fired glad to see you back; wonder some bird did n't tell her you'd come."

"The birds have n't found it out yet; they are too sleepy, and I have not disturbed their nap," laughed Ruth—her old gay laugh. "I'm glad Aunt Peggy is all right, for I may need her and I do n't want a thief in the house."

"I tell you, Ruth, it's good to hear you laugh so jolly-like. This place has been doleful without you. That girl, Laura, she giggles and giggles, but she has n't got sense enough to laugh in the right spot. Her giggling does provoke the old lady; aggravates her, like."

"Girls have a right to giggle; have n't they? and be gay and full of fun."

"S'pose they have, but they might have sense enough to bring it in just the right time, or it's silly."

The next morning Mrs. Avery was up and dressed, trying to help with the breakfast, when Ruth came down stairs. She looked so tired and feeble that Ruth finally persuaded her to sit down in the big rocking-chair and leave the work to younger hands. Ruth, with her neat calico dress, gingham apron and deft, tidy ways, was a delight to Mrs. Avery's eyes. She watched her quick, handy movements, as she went back and forth, with a real pleasure. "It will all be right, now Ruth has come," was her feeling.



"Perhaps you had better keep Laura a few days, Ruth ; you can manage her, and get this house cleaned up a little and put in some decent kind of order. I suppose I can stand seeing her around a few days longer." So it was arranged for Laura to stay.

Mrs. Avery asked a short blessing at table, and after the meal called for the Bible and asked Ruth to read the ninety-first Psalm. Very sweet and comforting the beautiful words sounded as the young girl recited them very expressively, for she knew that Psalm by heart. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." Ruth thought of the time she heard Mr. Wardell — dear Uncle James — read that chapter when its majestic beauty so impressed her that she went to her room and committed it to memory. And now its images of God's love and care made her heart glad.

After the reading Mrs. Avery said, sadly, "I cannot kneel, but you all can." Sitting in her chair she offered a short prayer, so sweet and tender that Ruth could hardly believe it came from the lips of the grandmother she once thought so harsh and cruel. It was full of gratitude to God for his mercies, especially for the safe return of our "dear loved child."

That afternoon and several others were re-



ception days for Ruth, Mrs. Hart, the Stedmans and others of her school friends coming out to welcome her home. Ruth was overjoyed to see Annie Stedman; out in the orchard they held what Harry would have called "the longest kind of a confab."

But from no one did Ruth receive a warmer welcome than from poor old Aunt Peggy. "Oh, dear honey, child, I's so glad to see your pretty face. Lemme hug and kiss you. I wos fear'd your granny'd go 'fore you got back."

"Why, Aunt Peggy, grandma is n't going to die; she seems so sweet and bright to-day."

"Your comin' has heartened her up; but she is mighty bad some days. The doctor, he say she can't get well; may go 'most any time."

Ruth dropped into a chair crying bitterly. "Do n't say that, Aunt Peggy. She can't go yet; she must stay a little longer, until I show her how much I love her. My poor dear grandma!"

"Do n't cry, honey," trying to comfort her. "These doctors are fool men anyhow; don't know about times and seasons. God, he knows, and he may keep granny here many a year; so cheer up, my hearty!"



## CHAPTER XXV.

RUTH found plenty to do besides visiting her school-mates. The mornings were busy ones. Soon she and Laura had the house restored to its pristine neatness and order, to Mrs. Avery's great satisfaction. Then Sam took the girl back to her home and Peggy came over almost daily to help with the work.

"Miss Ruth," she exclaimed one day, and Ruth started at the respectful prefix, "you's a lady, a born lady; not like that Laura; I've no use for her. You's learned some of Aunt Amy's fine ways, so sweet and quiet-like. And you's growed powerful good; hope you ain't going up, like your granny."

Ruth could not but smile. "I think not, Peggy; I'm not fit to go yet, I am sure."

"When I spilt cream so keerless the other day, all over the pantry floor, I thought you'd flare up and scold me, but you did n't. And when the missus asks 'What's the matter?' you says so gentle-like, 'Peggy's had a little accident,' 'stead of saying 'That good-for-nothing Peggy has wasted all the cream.' Yes, you've growed powerful good."



Ruth laughed a little, then said very soberly, "Peggy, I do hope God has given me the victory over some of my naughty ways."

"He has, honey, sure, and so he has this poor nigger;" then confidentially, "I don't steal no more."

Daily Mrs. Avery gave matters up more and more completely into Ruth's hands, spending her time almost entirely in bed or in the easy chair in the sunny kitchen. But she seemed so sweet and gentle, so thoughtful of others, so tenderly affectionate toward her grandchild, that Ruth could not believe that life and strength were gradually failing. Occasionally Ruth found time for a stroll in her loved woods, or down by the purling brook, always with drawing paper and pencils in hand, but the most of the hours were spent busily at work about the house or in caring for her grandmother.

Sometimes she went to her plain little room tired and discouraged. The work was often very hard and irksome after her long vacation. She would look with longing upon her closed books and with disgust at her hands, "getting so hard and stiff they never can play again on the piano," she thought. Then she would long to fly away to the beautiful nest she had left. But strong, helpful letters would come from Aunt Amy, inspiring new hope and courage, or



rollicking ones from Harry, and the clouds would vanish for the time.

It was very sweet to be told by one and another of the dear family how much she was missed; yet sometimes she wished they would not mention it, it made her so wish to be with them all. Her short stay among them seemed now like a lovely dream that never could have been real, so different was it from her present work-day plodding life. Rebellious thoughts and feelings often found a place in her heart; but they fled away when she looked into her grandmother's face, so serene unless when in great pain, and noticed the satisfied, loving expression of the bright eyes as they rested upon "my Ruth."

"Stay a while, child. I want to talk with you on some business matters," said Mrs. Avery one evening, laying a detaining hand on Ruth's arm.

"Not to-night, grandma; it is late and you are tired. Go right to sleep."

"I want to do it to-night and have it off my mind." Then she told Ruth about certain papers, where they were; who had her will—a lawyer in the village—and explained some things about her money matters. "Now remember, child, so if anything happens—" "Why, grandma," interrupted Ruth in alarm, "the doctor does not think you are any worse, does he?"



"Perhaps not, but I want you to understand these things. Now get pencil and paper and make a little memorandum for me." Then she mentioned several of her nice pieces of old-fashioned furniture and her brass andirons and candlesticks. "I want your Aunt Amy to have them; she will appreciate them and take good care of them." Other keepsakes for May, Belle, and other friends, were added to the list. "Now lay that paper away and keep it safely. I am glad that is done.

"Do not be frightened, child," as she noticed Ruth's white face; "it is what every one ought to do. We do not die any sooner for having our earthly business all arranged."

Then she talked of her early life, of her sorrows and struggles, and of the battle she had with a relative who tried to cheat her out of the little property after her husband's death. "All these troubles, instead of driving me to God, made me hard and worldly. Yes, I have been a hard, worldly woman. I have been harsh and exacting with you; I thought I was doing my duty, but now I see my mistake. Before you left I was cross and unreasonable; this mortal sickness was creeping on; I suspected, it and rebelled, until God showed me a better way. I want you to forgive me that I failed in love, in gentleness and patience with you."



Remorse and grief were tugging at Ruth's heartstrings; it was more than she could bear. She sank down on her knees by the bed and buried her face in her hands.

"Oh, dear grandma, do n't talk so; I have n't given you the love you deserved; I have been so impatient and so angry with you at the least thing, all the time you have been denying yourself to do for me. I am the wicked, ungrateful one."

"We have both been at fault, dear; but I see now that I often provoked you to your fits of anger; I did not help you as Amy did. I want to tell you," fondly stroking the bowed head, "while I have my faculties, just how I feel now and how sorry I am, so that you need not have any bitter thoughts of your poor old grandmother when she is dead and gone. God has forgiven me; it is all right between my soul and him. He will forgive you and help you to be a better woman than I have been."

Ruth caught her grandmother's thin hand, fondling and kissing it, and saying again, "Dear, darling grandma, oh, forgive me!"

"I have nothing to forgive, my dear child; you are a blessing and a comfort. What should I do now if the Lord had not given me my Ruth? Now go to bed; do not cry, but put up a little prayer for us both."



But Ruth's prayers that evening were all for herself; her grandmother seemed to her then too good and angelic to need any human petitions. As she was leaving the room Mrs. Avery asked, "Did your aunt say in her last letter that she was ready to come now any time we wanted her?"

"Yes, grandma, any time."

"I think you had better write to-morrow that we want her very much."

Ruth again looked frightened.

"Don't be alarmed, child. It is hard for you. I don't intend to have you get all used up, as you did before, and lose all your roses. Then I want to see Amy; I am longing for her."

"I will write the first thing in the morning, grandma," and Ruth went to the little room next her grandmother's, where she had slept the most of the time since her return, but her eyes would not close. For the first time in her life she realized something of the terrible meaning of death. She was not at home when her mother died. This shadow of death hanging over her filled her young heart with horror and dread. "Can it be that grandmother must die, and be buried in the dark ground?" she asked herself with a cold tremor. "She must not go now, when we love each other so much."



With the natural buoyancy of her age and temperament she had thought and hoped that Mrs. Avery would soon begin to mend. When she noticed the increased feebleness it seemed only the infirmity of years; she had cheered herself with the thought, "She may stay with us yet a long time." But now evidently her grandmother expected to die, perhaps very soon, and was making all these arrangements on that account.

The only thing that could quiet her was the thought that Aunt Amy would come very soon. So at last she fell into a fitful sleep, broken by ghastly dreams. Several times she woke with a start; the moaning of the summer wind seemed a dirge, and the faint light from the other room cast gloomy shadows. She went and stood by her grandmother's bed and thought death had come, the face was so corpse-like, and she could not hear the breathing. Her own heart thumped loudly with affright. Terrified, she was about to call Sam when the patient moved and she heard her gentle breathing. She went back to her own room greatly relieved. Already the cocks were crowing. "It will soon be morning," she thought, and with a whispered prayer she fell into a sound slumber, from which she did not awake until the sun was shining in at the windows.



## CHAPTER XXVI.

WITH God's beautiful sunshine lighting up the world everything looked brighter and more hopeful. Ruth found Mrs. Avery so cheery that all the fears of the previous night vanished like a bad dream. For the first time Mrs. Avery consented to take her breakfast in bed. "You feel weak this morning; you talked too much last night, grandmother."

"I suppose I did; but now it's all done and I will rest all day and be waited on," with a happy smile.

Ruth's nimble feet were winged by love that morning as she prepared a delicious breakfast, and she sang softly to herself.

"Sing out, Ruth; I love to hear you. Sing me a hymn and then I will sleep. Be sure and remember the letter," as she carried out the tray.

Ruth left her dozing quietly, wrote the promised letter, then despatched Sam to the office.

"Writ for your aunt to come?"

"Yes, I have."

"Is the old lady worse?"



"No, she's not worse, but she wants to see Aunt Amy. Do you stop your croaking, Sam, and don't be telling all over the village that grandma's going to die. 'I think she may get well, and live.'"

"Bah! them that knows nothing fears nothing. I guess doctors know more than chits of girls."

"I'm not a chit of a girl! I'm past fifteen; shall be sixteen before long. I thought you didn't think much of doctors, Sam? But no matter; you hurry off, and be sure and bring these dainties for grandma," giving him a list.

"Some folks put on great airs," he muttered as he strode off to the barn. "Past fifteen, hey? great age for wisdom; she's pert, but she's smart; things do gibe along like clock-work. Glad her aunt's coming, though; there's trouble ahead."

"What a queer specimen he is, though," laughed Ruth, as he and Dollie disappeared down the road.

"Why, Miss Ruth," exclaimed Peggy, when she arrived—she never forgot the "Miss" in these days—"your face just like sunshine to-day; it do my old soul good to look at you. Is granny better?"

"I think so, a little, and she's so sweet and good I wish she could live forever."



"She's just a pluming of her wings, I guess."

"Now, Peggy, don't! Not to fly away, but to stay, I hope."

"I hope so too, honey, but I's had a warning."

"Nonsense, Peggy; I don't believe in any such things."

Peggy gave her a look of pity, and said under her breath. "Poor young things! They's always a hoping."

The days that followed before the arrival of Mrs. Wardell were delightful ones for Ruth, made bright by the hope of Aunt Amy's coming, and happy—oh, so happy—by doing all she could for the comfort of the dear grandparent. She felt that she could not do enough to show her love and gratitude. Mrs. Avery exerted herself to get up and sit by the window in the clean airy kitchen a small part of each day, her eyes following Ruth with loving tenderness. The grandmother and her child had come to a full and perfect understanding; they were as joyful in their newly-found and acknowledged affection as are two young lovers. Ruth would pet her grandmother, stroking her cheek, kissing her, and trying in every way possible to express her feelings, and the poor old withered heart, that so often had shut itself against human



love, opened gladly to receive and to return this wealth of tender devotion.

Was it not an emblem of the life of eternal love to be lived in the heavenly land; a foretaste of the beyond?

Ruth's joy was complete when she was folded to the motherly heart of "dear Aunt Amy," and saw that this loved one was welcomed almost as gladly by Mrs. Avery as by herself.

For two weeks after Mrs. Wardell's coming life in the cottage went on very quietly and happily. Ruth was relieved of much of the care, and so could often ramble into the woods or take a drive to the village, always returning with something for grandma. Anything that Ruth's loved hands brought—even to the despised "woodsy treasures"—was welcomed and enjoyed by Mrs. Avery; she was especially interested in Ruth's little drawings or paintings. The love and sympathy between the two was beautiful to see.

Mrs. Wardell found her mother greatly changed in spirit. "The peace and rest of God are in this little cottage, and in dear mother's heart," she wrote to her husband. Under Mrs. Wardell's good nursing Mrs. Avery improved; to Ruth's young, hopeful sight she seemed to be regaining health and strength, but Mrs. Wardell's more experienced eyes saw



that the gain was only temporary ; with the intense heat of midsummer the patient grew weaker.

One evening she was taken suddenly worse and the doctor was hastily summoned. For several days she suffered great agony. Poor Ruth was almost distracted ; but they kept her busy around the house while Mrs Wardell and other friends cared for the sick one. Then one day toward sunset she grew very quiet ; the pain left her and she sank into a sweet sleep.

"I think mother will have a comfortable night," said Aunt Amy, "and you and I, Ruth, will have a good rest ; for Mrs. Hart will sit up, and she is the best kind of a nurse." Ruth reluctantly went up to her own room and Mrs. Wardell went with her. "Is the danger all past?" asked the excited girl.

"The present danger is, I hope, but we cannot tell. God has dear mother in his keeping ; we must trust her in his loving hands."

It seemed to Ruth that she had slept but a few moments when Aunt Amy stood by her bed saying very quietly, "Come, Ruth dear, your grandmother is going away, and she wants to say good-by."

She followed her aunt, like one in a dream, into the room, and gazed with wonder and awe upon her grandmother's illumined face. Some-



thing in the air, peaceful and heavenly, stilled her grief—as it were the hush of angels' wings.

“Mother,” said Mrs. Wardell softly, “you asked for Ruth; here she is.” She opened upon her grandchild eyes full of love and tenderness.

“Dear, *dear* Ruth, good-by; come up there,” she whispered, pointing upwards, then said very distinctly, “‘The Lord bless thee and keep thee,’ my own one,” laying Ruth's little cold hand in that of Mrs. Wardell. Softly Mrs. Wardell sang, “Jesus, Lover of my soul,” but before the verse was ended, with a smile of ineffable joy, the freed spirit went home to its God. All was very still in the room, only the soft sighing of the wind that seemed a very voice from heaven to Ruth. She could not weep with that joyful face there on the pillow.

“Can this be death?” she whispered, clinging to her aunt. “I thought death was something dreadful; but this is a happy going to sleep,” and her face shone with a reflected light.

“‘There is no death,’ dear Ruth; ‘what seems so is transition,’” with the same look of triumphant joy that so transfigured the face of the sleeper. “The Saviour has come for his own, and now she is with the blessed.”



## CHAPTER XXVII.

A WEEK had passed since Grandma Avery "went home to God," for Ruth could never think nor say "grandma died." "Why, Aunt Amy, she only closed her eyes and smiled, and then her spirit was in heaven. I fancied the room was full of angels, sent to bear her away to God. That is not dying; is it? If it is, I shall never be afraid to die."

"Why should you be afraid, or any one of God's dear children? It is only the great Father calling his beloved ones to himself, to dwell for ever with him."

The two were sitting in the parlor with the blinds thrown open to the west, for Ruth could not bear to stay in the pleasant kitchen where "I expect to see grandma every moment." The sun was just sinking below the horizon, leaving behind a glorified earth and sky.

"Her going was just like this sunset, only she wont come back to-morrow," with a sigh.

"No, dear, but we shall go to her some day."

It had been a busy week, with the funeral, and much company in the house. There had been no opportunity for quiet talks and the



forming of any plans for the future; indeed Ruth had been too excited and nervous to give any thought to anything but the loved grandmother and her unexpected departure—for the young girl could not believe, until the last moment, but that she would recover; to Ruth it was all very sudden.

“Ruth, you must not mourn for your grandmother as you do; it is not right, when you know how happy she is in her blest abode.”

“Oh, Aunt Amy, it is not for her I mourn, but for myself; if I had only loved her more and been kinder to her all those years. How angry I used to get with her, and stamp my foot at her, and call her all kind of names in my heart. If I could only take it all back I could be happy. Poor dear grandma!”

“But you cannot recall it, dear child. ‘Let the dead past bury its dead,’ and begin anew,” and Mrs. Wardell took the weeping girl in her arms, as she had so often done, soothing and comforting her until she grew quiet and more cheerful.

“Ruth, have you thought what you would like to do in the future?” she asked at length, “and where you would like to live?”

“I should like to be a teacher, but I don’t know enough yet.”

“You saw your grandmother put your hand



in mine and give you to me that last night ; did you not ?”

“ I did not understand.”

“ She told me, long before she left us, that she would like you to live with me. Do you think that you would like to be my daughter ?”

Ruth clasped her aunt more closely. “ Oh, Aunt Amy, I should like that of all things ; but will you want me ?”

“ I want you very much, Ruth, and shall be greatly disappointed if you do not come and be my own dear child.”

“ Then, Aunt Amy, I certainly will come ; for there is no place on the face of the earth where I should rather live,” with a touch of her old brightness.

“ No need to discuss that point then, as I see,” laughed Mrs. Wardell, giving Ruth a loving hug, “ and I shall claim you as my daughter. Mother told me of her will, and of some other papers, and said that you understood all about them.”

“ Yes, she told me ;” then Ruth remembered the memorandum, and brought it to her aunt from its safe hiding-place.

“ How lovely and thoughtful in mother to give me all those pretty things, the very articles I admire and shall prize for her sake,” said Mrs. Wardell, greatly touched.



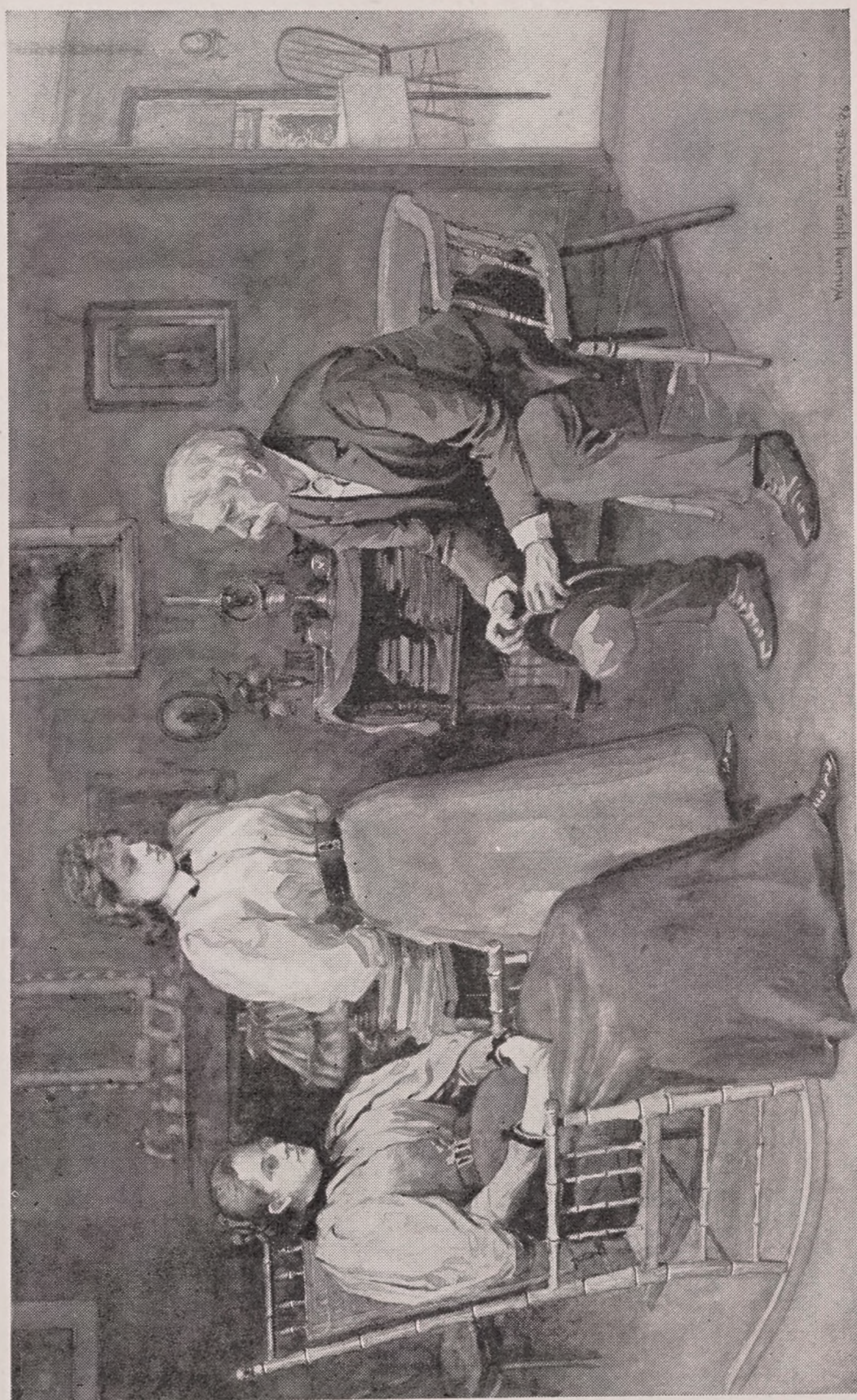
The next day, when the will was opened and read, Ruth found herself the possessor of a snug little sum in the bank and of the cottage, with its small farm attached. Mrs. Avery and Sam had managed—or Mrs. Avery had planned and Sam had executed—so that nothing had been neglected: the land was well tilled, and everything about the house and farm was in good order. With the exception of small legacies, to Sam, Peggy, and a few friends, all was left to “my dear grandchild, Ruth Avery.”

When Ruth understood what her grandmother had given her she was in a state of surprise and of remorse. She looked so distressed that the lawyer remarked, “Miss Ruth, you do not seem to be very happy over your good fortune; you are quite an heiress, for this little country town.”

“How could she be so good and kind to me when I’ve been so unkind to her so many times!” she asked her aunt when they were alone.

“Ruth, my child, you must not condemn yourself that way. Think how devoted you have been to her these last weeks, and how faithful you were in her other sickness. To whom should she give her little all excepting to you, her nearest of kin and the one she loved best on earth? It is just as it should be. You











must take it and be thankful, rejoicing that you could do so much to make her last days happy. She told me, over and over, what a comfort you had been to her. Think of that and be glad, and do not think of the many failures."

One evening, a few days after the opening of the will, Sam walked into the parlor, dressed in his very best, and seated himself on the edge of a chair, twirling his hat in his hands, evidently greatly embarrassed. "What is it, Sam?" asked Mrs. Wardell very kindly.

"Is it true that Ruth—Miss Ruth—is going to have the place?"

"Yes, Sam; that is the way Mrs. Avery arranged matters."

"I just 'spected so from what the old lady told me long afore she went." Then, after a long pause, "Does she want to sell?"

"I do not know; we have not talked that over yet; I think she will have to. Why do you ask?"

"Because, if this place's on the market, I want to buy," with a very important air.

"You buy it, Sam!" exclaimed Ruth, opening her eyes in amazement. "You can't live here all alone; what foolishness!"

"I ain't going to live alone. I'm going to get married."

"Married! To whom, pray, Sam?"



"To Lizzie Bray; me and Lizzie made it up last night."

"Lizzie Bray and you going to be married!" and Ruth threw up her hands in surprise.

"Why not? She wants a home and so do I; we're both getting along in life, we're no chickens. I've saved some chink, and so has Lizzie, and she's very willing to have me," getting more and more confused.

Mrs. Wardell came to his relief, "Of course, Sam. A very good arrangement. I think mother, and Ruth too, would be glad to have you own the old homestead. With your savings and the little legacy from Mrs. Avery I presume you can pay for it in a few years. You do not object, do you, Ruth?"

"Why, no; of course not."

"Lizzie's neat as wax, a real worker, and if you and Miss Ruth want to come here summers the latch-string's out. Don't you think, Mis' Wardell, it's a good thing for me and Lizzie to settle down?"

"Yes, Sam, a very good thing; I for one shall be glad to see the place in your hands."

In a few days the bargain was completed and Sam owned the place, to his great delight; a "land owner" for the first time in his life. A very self-satisfied, self-important one he was. "You see," he confided to Mrs. Wardell, "I



did n't want them fields I'd worked all these years going into strange hands. Me and the old lady's had a hard time keeping them just right, and I did n't want to see all that toil just thrown away. When she died I lost a good friend, I knew. Then I had no home, so I thought, I'll make one of my own," rubbing his hands in satisfaction, "and Lizzie—well, she thought she'd go halves."

"I am glad for you, Sam."

At last the old home was dismantled, with the exception of the things that Sam had bought or that had been given him for his new house-keeping. The boxes and trunks were all packed and mostly forwarded, and on the morrow Mrs. Wardell and Ruth were to start for R——. It had taken several weeks to arrange everything and now Mrs. Wardell began to be in haste to get back to her family. Ruth's plain little chamber had been left undisturbed, "so that you can come back next summer if you like," suggested Aunt Amy, seeing how hard it was going to be for Ruth to give up the old home entirely.

She had spent the morning bidding adieu to the schoolmates and friends of her childhood—finding it very hard to part with sweet Annie Stedman—and in the afternoon she and her aunt passed several delightful hours in her



beloved woods. The birds, the flowers, the brook, received a farewell, for they were like dear companions to the imaginative girl. "But I shall not need them so much any more, for I shall always have you," looking up with love-lit eyes into her aunt's face.

After tea—a picnic tea—Sam came in, again dressed in his best, to inform them, "I'm a-going over to Lizzie's to get married this evening," with an air of great dignity.

"You are? and not invite us to the wedding?" exclaimed Ruth.

"Well, you see, we thought we'd just stand up—me and Lizzie—and be spliced without anybody but her folks and the minister; no fuss, you see; thought that'd be the best way," getting confused.

"And may your married life be a very happy one, Sam," said Mrs. Wardell, to which Ruth added a hearty "Amen!"

Sam smiled all over his face. "I guess it will be; anyway, we thought we'd have the job done before you left, so we could move right in to-morrow."

As the twilight deepened the moon shone out on the two seated on the little porch. Nothing but the occasional twitter of a bird disturbed the country stillness. Ruth grew very sober.

"Aunt Amy, I shall always love to remember



these last weeks here with grandma; oh how sweet they were!"

"They were beautiful; I am glad for you that you have them to recall."

"Will you ever be sorry, Aunt Amy, that you took me, I wonder."

"No, my dear, never."

"I'm glad to go, it's so lonesome here without grandma; I hope I shall never give you a heartache. I can come every year—can't I?—and see that her grave is all in order. Dear grandma!"

"It might be pleasant for us all to come sometime and spend a few weeks."

"That would be very pleasant." Then again Ruth was silent.

"There is one thing that I want to tell you, Ruth, before we leave the old home. When I first came, before mother was so weak and feeble, she said to me: 'Ruth I find is greatly changed; I think that the dear Lord has given her the victory over her fiery temper.'"

"Did grandma say that? I am glad you told me."

Only a little maiden's victory, but it was chronicled in heaven by the Recording Angel.

In the coolness and freshness of the early morning Aunt Amy and her niece—or daughter—started on their journey. "Take good care



of Dollie," was one of Ruth's parting injunctions to Sam; "she is never to be sold." With old Aunt Peggy, her eyes streaming, to wave them a farewell, and Sam and Dollie to take them to the station, Ruth Avery left the home of her childish years, to begin a new and happier life, replete with usefulness and joy.























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